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FICP Sets Attendance Record at Annual Conference

While attending the recent Financial & Insurance Conference Professionals (FICP) annual conference held in Austin, Texas, we gained input from Steve Bova, CAE, executive director, on a number of areas that will affect insurance and financial planners going forward in 2020. We also learned about current conditions as to what’s new and exciting within the association as it continues to grow and increase membership. Every conference presents opportunities that show the uniqueness of the venue. FICP partnered with the host convention and visitors bureau, Visit Austin, to offer a pre-event city tour while Visit Austin also hosted an evening event that played up the city’s reputation for fantastic live music. Numerous takeaways for attendees resulted from the breakout sessions offered throughout the event. Continuing as popular offerings were the Meeting Professional Exchange, Speaker Showcase and an interactive CSR activity. Wayne Robinson, FICP 2019 chairman and assistant vice president, shared the organization’s strategic pillars: growth, value and influence. If you are not a member of FICP, now is the time to join and take advantage of the many benefits. Read the interview with Bova in “2020 Industry Outlook” beginning on page 18.

Food has always been a priority with meeting planners, so we are focusing on F&B with the inside scoop on the future food scene beginning on page 18. Know your audience says Elise Kaiser, program manager with Bishop-McCann LLC, an industry leader in producing meetings, incentive programs and events worldwide. Food diversity and global cuisine are active programs and events worldwide. Food diversity and global cuisine are extremely important with an international attendee base.

Check out the winners of the 2019 “World Class Award” as voted by the subscribers of Insurance & Financial Meetings Management magazine starting on Page 54. Also in this issue, don’t miss the update on New Orleans and Florida, both popular destinations that continue to offer compelling activity. Wayne Robinson, FICP 2019 chair and assistant vice president, shared the organization’s strategic pillars: growth, value and influence. If you are not a member of FICP, now is the time to join and take advantage of the many benefits.
THE BROADMOOR ANNOUNCES NEW 110,000-SF EXHIBITION HALL
COLORADO SPRINGS, CO — The Broadmoor in Colorado Springs, one of Colorado's top destinations for events, will soon offer the most luxurious trade show and exhibition hall experience in the industry, as the only Forbes Five-Star, AAA Five-Diamond-awarded hotel in the country to operate a large, on-site exhibition space. When the newly-announced 110,000 sf of exhibition space and associated breakout rooms debut next spring, the resort will be able to provide the highest level of service large conference or trade show attendees can receive. Together, the exhibit hall addition and the existing Broadmoor Hall, International Center and Colorado Hall will comprise The Broadmoor Event Center, with a combined square footage of more than 300,000 sf. The new exhibit building will be located next to Broadmoor Hall, and a new 30-foot wide, 180-foot long hallway will serve as a substantial connector. The facility will provide 32 break-out rooms wired with built-in screens and the most modern technology.

HARD ROCK INTERNATIONAL ANNOUNCES PLANS FOR HARD ROCK CASINO BRISTOL IN VIRGINIA; WILL TEAM WITH BRISTOL RESORT & CASINO TO RUN PROPOSED RESORT
HOLLYWOOD, FL — Hard Rock Casino announced plans to open a location in Bristol, Virginia. Hard Rock International plans to team with Bristol Resort & Casino to run the proposed resort and casino. “We are excited to collaborate with Hard Rock, a world-class entertainment brand with a strong history of supporting communities and drawing devoted customers across the country and around the world,” Jim McGlothlin, CEO of The United Company and partner on the project, says. “Hard Rock’s iconic brand speaks to its deep roots in live music entertainment and world-class memorabilia collection, which will play a prominent role at Hard Rock Casino Bristol. This focus on music will complement our region’s country music heritage and dynamic music scene in the Twin City.” The casino must pass several legislative steps, both state and local, in 2020 before the casino plan is approved. Bristol, Virginia is 300 miles southwest of Richmond near the Virginia-Tennessee border.

HYATT RESORTS OPEN IN DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
CAP CANA, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC — The Hyatt Ziva and Hyatt Zilara, all-inclusive resorts, in Cap Cana, Dominican Republic, opened recently. The two resorts are Hyatt’s first in the Dominican Republic. Set on 40 acres on Juanillo Beach, the resorts are owned and operated by Playa Hotels & Resorts. While the Hyatt Zilara is exclusively for adults, both resorts offer shared amenities, including nine dining venues, waters sports, cooking classes and painting classes, and the Larimar Spa with a Himalayan salt lounge. The resorts are offering a 55% discount off the standard rate on book now through the end of the year.

MARGARITAVILLE LAKE RESORT, LAKE CONROE-HOU, WILL OPEN IN 2020
THE WOODLANDS (HOUS.), TX — BENCHMARK, a global hospitality company, will operate the first Margaritaville Resort in Texas. Scheduled to open next summer, the Margaritaville Lake Resort, Lake Conroe, Houston, will offer an array of recreational activities, including an 18-hole golf course and a 3-acre water park with a lazy river and outdoor pools. The resort will feature 72,000 sf of indoor/outdoor, IACC approved meeting space and can host special events and meetings of every size. The Margaritaville Lake Resort, Lake Conroe, will be part of Benchmark’s signature brand, Benchmark Resorts & Hotels. “Margaritaville is very excited to be part of this groundbreaking project that will bring the iconic Margaritaville brand to the Houston market, and to our neighbors throughout the Lone Star State, and beyond,” says Alex Cabanas, Benchmark CEO.

CONVENTIONEXHIBITION HALL OF LEADERS
BOB MOORE AND NANCY NOVOGROD INDUCTED INTO U.S. TRAVEL HALL OF LEADERS
WASHINGTON, DC — Travel industry leaders Bob Moore, former longtime Hilton executive, and Nancy Novogrod, the 21-year editor-in-chief of Travel + Leisure, are honored as the 2019 inductees into the U.S. Travel Association Hall of Leaders. Moore began his career in the travel industry, dedicating more than 20 years to the Hilton Hotels Corporation. After 22 years, he took his expertise first to the Los Angeles Convention and Visitors Bureau, followed by Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide, and finally to Freeman. Additionally, Moore served as national chair of the U.S. Travel Association, previously named Travel Industry Association of America, in 1995, and led Meeting Professionals International (MPI). For the highly regarded Travel + Leisure magazine, Novogrod served as editor-in-chief from 1993-2014. She evolved the industry-leading brand and continue to explore new and creative ways to work together to inspire travel. Expedia Group presented six EPIC Awards to partners in the travel industry, celebrating inspirational lodging, air, car, activities, cruise and media solutions partners in Latin America and North America. MGM Resorts was one of two winners selected in the lodging category. “This prestigious recognition is an incredible honor for our team members,” Lee Ann Benavidez, vice president of Transient Strategy and Sales Operations for MGM Resorts International, says. “I’d like to thank Expedia Group for their commitment to our partnership and for recognizing MGM Resorts in our endeavor to always offer our guests best-in-class experiences and outstanding service.”

LAS VEGAS — MGM Resorts International was recently honored with the ‘EPIC’ Award for outstanding lodging at explore '19 in Las Vegas by Expedia Group, a global travel technology platform that hosts full-service travel research, planning and booking. The accolade celebrates organizations that exceed the values of engagement, partnership, innovation and collaboration, and continue to explore new and creative ways to work together to inspire travel. Expedia Group presented six EPIC Awards to partners in the travel industry, celebrating inspirational lodging, air, car, activities, cruise and media solutions partners in Latin America and North America. MGM Resorts was one of two winners selected in the lodging category. ‘This prestigious recognition is an incredible honor for our team members,” Lee Ann Benavidez, vice president of Transient Strategy and Sales Operations for MGM Resorts International, says. “I’d like to thank Expedia Group for their commitment to our partnership and for recognizing MGM Resorts in our endeavor to always offer our guests best-in-class experiences and outstanding service.”

L-R: Elliott Ferguson, Destination DC president and CEO and U.S. Travel National Chair; Bob Moore; Nancy Novogrod; and Roger Dow, U.S. Travel president and CEO. Inducted individuals to U.S. Travel’s Hall of Leaders for “sustained, noteworthy contributions that have positively impacted the travel industry and raised industry-wide standards,” Moore and Novogrod were honored at a dinner attended by more than 100 travel industry leaders.

MGM RESORTS INTERNATIONAL RECOGNIZED WITH ‘EPIC’ AWARD BY EXPEDIA GROUP
LAS VEGAS — MGM Resorts Internation- al was recently honored with the ‘EPIC’ Award for outstanding lodging at explore '19 in Las Vegas by Expedia Group, a global travel technology platform that hosts full-service travel research, planning and book- ing. The accolade celebrates organizations that exceed the values of engagement, partnership, innovation and collaboration, and continue to explore new and creative ways to work together to inspire travel. Expedia Group presented six EPIC Awards to partners in the travel industry, celebrating inspirational lodging, air, car, activities, cruise and media solutions partners in Latin America and North America. MGM Resorts was one of two winners selected in the lodging category. ‘This prestigious recognition is an incredible honor for our team members,” Lee Ann Benavidez, vice president of Transient Strategy and Sales Operations for MGM Resorts International, says. “I’d like to thank Expedia Group for their commitment to our partnership and for recognizing MGM Resorts in our endeavor to always offer our guests best-in-class experiences and outstanding service.”
ROYAL CARIBBEAN COMPLETES OASIS OF THE SEAS MAKEOVER

MIAMI, FL — Royal Caribbean’s Oasis of the Seas has recently received $165 million in refurbishments and improvements, including many elements that first appeared on Royal Caribbean’s Quantum-class ships. Among those elements are the two-story Music Hall and the Bionic Bar, where two robotic bartenders mix drinks for passengers. Also retrofitted onto the ship was a package of slides that weren’t part of Royal Caribbean’s featured lineup when the Oasis debuted in 2009. The package includes the 10-story Ultimate Abyss dry slide and the Perfect Storm, three high-speed water slides known as Typhoon, Cyclone and Supercell. Other features that have debuted on Quantum ships or on recent makeovers of Oasis-class ships include the Lime & Coconut multistory pool deck bar, a Sugar Beach candy store, an El Loco Fresh casual Mexican eatery and a Playmakers Sports Bar & Arcade.

ST. THOMAS OPENS IN USVI

The Ritz-Carlton, St. Thomas has officially reopened, following closure since the 2017 hurricanes. The property underwent a $100 million restoration and renovation. Ritz-Carlton, St. Thomas is a prime destination for meetings, incentives, conferences and events — especially with the addition of El Distrito, an immersive, multi-seasonal, audiovisual and technologically advanced experience as never seen in the Caribbean. From a 177-room Aloft hotel, an exhilarating urban zip line, a variety of restaurants, bars, lounges, the first day/night disco, and eight premium movie theaters, the 360,000-sf state-of-the-art entertainment, retail and dining project combines the best in art, music, technology and hospitality. El Distrito offers the ease of doing business with a U.S. destination, plus the allure of a Caribbean island filled with unique history and culture.

SAN JUAN’S NEW ENTERTAINMENT COMPLEX, EL DISTRITO

SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO — Puerto Rico is a prime island filled with unique history, plus the allure of a Caribbean destination for meetings, incentives, conferences and events — especially with the addition of El Distrito, an immersive, multi-seasonal, audiovisual and technologically advanced experience as never seen in the Caribbean. From a 177-room Aloft hotel, an exhilarating urban zip line, a variety of restaurants, bars, lounges, the first day/night disco, and eight premium movie theaters, the 360,000-sf state-of-the-art entertainment, retail and dining project combines the best in art, music, technology and hospitality. El Distrito offers the ease of doing business with a U.S. destination, plus the allure of a Caribbean island filled with unique history and culture.

THE HIGGINS HOTEL NEW ORLEANS OFFICIALLY OPENS

NEW ORLEANS — The National WWII Museum has recently announced the official opening of its landmark hotel property The Higgins Hotel New Orleans, Curio Collection by Hilton. Located in the Arts and Warehouse District in New Orleans, the Hotel features 18,000 sf of meeting and event space, all set with a tasteful Art Deco design. The Hotel is the first in the state of Louisiana to be part of the exclusive Curio Collection by Hilton, and all proceeds generated will support the ongoing educational mission of the Museum. As an extension of the Museum, the Hotel sits directly on the campus of the city’s top attraction and tells the story of World War II through the unique lens of design, decor, era-inspired menus and entertainment.

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Offer is valid for newly contracted meetings or group incentives with 75 or more paid room nights at peaks in accordance with the Sales Contract. Offer not valid in conjunction with any previously booked or midweek events or events and may not be combined with other promotional offers. Meeting must be booked by 1/31/2020 and held by 12/30/2020 and is subject to availability of function space and guest rooms at time of booking. Blackout dates may apply. Qualifying planners who are Marriott Bonvoy members may also be eligible for Marriott Bonvoy Events program points. Marriott Bonvoy Events program points must be requested at time of booking. Not responsible for omissions or typographical errors.
FICP 2019

Austin, Texas November 10-13, 2019

FICP’s flagship annual event, held at the Fairmont Austin Hotel, brought together meetings professionals and hospitality partners from around the globe for three days of timely education, unique networking opportunities and an overall unforgettable event.

FICP’s vision is to amplify the positive impact and value of financial services and insurance industry meetings and events professionals.
How to Lead and Succeed in the Age of Constant Disruption

New Leadership Strategies Can Help You Survive and Thrive Despite Ongoing Uncertainty

BY SCOTT STEINBERG

S

o much for the idea of ‘status quo.’ As it pays to remind event attendees, while modern executives are no strangers to change and disruption, things only get more topsy-turvy for working professionals from here. In fact, according to recent surveys by consulting firm PwC, no two days on the job ever will be the same again. That’s because across every region of the world and every commercial sector, market leaders explain that the only consistent theme you can count on in coming years is: Unpredictability.

Think you’ve got a handle on how fast today’s business world moves? Think again. As we were shocked to find while researching our recent book, “Lead with Your Heart,” uncertainty is now the only certainty at work. The next 10 years will bring more change than the prior 10,000 years. And — thanks to rapid advancements in technology and communications tools — the one thing organizational leaders can count on going forward is that they’ll only be hit with more unforeseen disruptions harder, faster and from more angles than ever before. So what’s a forward-thinking executive to do if they want to help their enterprise stay ahead of the curve? Simple: Change their leadership and management style to make leadership a concept that scales. Provide workers the insights they need to facilitate more dynamic decision-making, provide staff with all the tools they need to stay better attuned to signals that the market is sending them, and be faster about adapting to these developments in turn.

Bearing this in mind, and that business and cultural trends are now evolving at an unprecedented pace, it’s no surprise that business leaders around the world note that strategic priorities for any organization hoping to get ahead in coming years must also evolve. Among the concepts they say, it’s now vital to champion your staff at meetings and events, and be more deliberate about putting systems and programs in place that can help frontline staff assume more of an ownership role in driving workplace decisions.

But most importantly, they also note that the best way to get ahead in uncertain times is always to double down and reinvest in your people — and that doing so can pay off in huge ways, because people are your most important asset today.

Taking this into account, today’s most effective leaders realize that being new and now — while things are going well, and you can most afford to take chances — is the most opportune time to start making a host of smart investments in initiatives that drive constant learning and growth for their organization. And that it’s also the best time to start encouraging staff to get behind the idea of making more insight-driven decisions, and educating themselves through a running process of trial and error that involves constantly brainstorming and testing a variety of new strategies and solutions.

Because in uncertain times, as we discovered, the irony is that you’ve got to take more risks, not fewer, if you want to get ahead. But these risks have to come in the form of small, smart, cost-effective bets designed as ongoing learning experiments that can help you quickly gain deeper insights into the shape of changing operating landscapes and make better and more informed choices as you become more informed. Likewise, to stay relevant — let alone ahead of the curve — organizations also have to start being more deliberate about putting systems and programs in place that can help frontline staff assume more of an ownership role in driving workplace decisions.

That’s because, ironically, studies of the world’s most innovative firms repeatedly show that end-users — everyday customers, strategic partners, various internal/external stakeholders that we serve, etc. — are the No. 1 most reliable proven source where organizations get successful new ideas. And yet, at the same time, research also tells us that less than a third of organizations have effective systems in place for capturing this feedback and using it to create winning solutions. Keeping this in mind, the real question you should be asking yourself as an executive leader going forward — and encouraging your co-workers to ask themselves — isn’t “Do we have what it takes to compete?” as your organization, it’s “Are we doing everything we can to give our people all the tools and resources they need to be listening to these insights, and promptly and intelligently responding to them in turn?”

Hailed as the World’s Leading Business Strategist, award-winning professional speaker Scott Steinberg is among today’s best-known trend experts and futurists, and the bestselling author of “Lead with Your Heart,” “Make Change Work for You: 10 Ways to Future-Proof Yourself, Fearlessly Innovate, and Succeed Despite Uncertainty” and “Mental Makeovers: Bridging the Generation Gap.” The president and CEO of BIZDEV: The International Association for Business Development and Strategic Partnerships, his website is aKeynoteSpeaker.com.

For example, Dell EMC is a market leader in the field of IT and big data. It has 60,000 employees worldwide. But when it has a huge, hard problem it just can’t seem to solve? It routinely pays the challenge to its employees in the form of an Innovation Contest. Workers are invited to suggest ideas for innovative new solutions — and can comment on these ideas, give colleagues feedback and vote on which are turned into real-world prototypes and products. But, it turns out that many of the firm’s most successful ventures are happening when employees worldwide are independently teaming up on their own time to bring new ideas to life that they found online, which weren’t technically contest winners. Likewise, you can see a host of government agencies employing similar solutions for accelerating and scaling innovation at Challenge.gov, a website where institutions like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Dept. of Defense put up contests asking the general public and private sector for help with tasks such as designing better healthcare solutions or building better underground bunkers. Prizes for winning solutions can often exceed $1 million — but it’s often a lot cheaper, comparatively, for creating platforms that allow them to radically multiply the number of winning solutions and solutions these programs can help surface.

Long story short — when it comes to getting ahead despite disruption, and finding ways to successfully navigate through change, even as an experienced team leader, it often pays to find more ways to step back and let others take the lead. The more you look to make leadership and innovation concepts that scale and programs and platforms in place to rapidly transform ideas into reality — say a running conference program or a host of experiential events and educational salons — the more successful you’ll be, no matter what the future brings.
How to Find and Maintain the Right DMC Partnership for Your Company

BY CINDY Y. LO, DMCP

Financial and insurance services meetings professionals should all know how valuable DMCs can be, having all worked with them countless times to create great events and meeting experiences. But if you want to take your meeting planning work to the next level and create truly unique and unforgettable meeting experiences for your attendees (and, yes, stay within your budget), consider turning to DMCs as a partner for next-level event strategizing and optimal meeting execution.

When you have the right DMC as your partner, it can become an extension of your team and your brand.

When you have the right DMC as your partner, it can become an extension of your team and your brand.

The overall company’s goals, to making sure the program content and design truly reflect the company’s culture. Meanwhile, your DMC partner acts as your eyes and ears on the ground, keeping you informed while helping you find better and more effective ways to stretch your budget creatively. We would love to share an insider’s peek at how our relationship works. We have been fortunate to work together as meetings professionals: Kendra Heredia, Marketing Manager for NORCAL Group and DMC Cindy Y. Lo, Red Velvet Events (RVE) for over a decade now, and our partnership has only gotten stronger over the years because of the trust we have established with one another. One of the many reasons we work so well together is because RVE handles Kendra’s programs and meetings as if they were its own. Because she was historically a team of one, and her recently expanded team supports many other national marketing efforts in addition to event design, RVE significantly augments its on-site staff size to accommodate her events. This ensures the best experience possible for her company’s incentive meeting. A productive and effective meetings professional and DMC partnership can only work if you have the right DMC on your side. So how do you find the perfect match for your company?

As the meetings professional, first you need to identify the resources your DMC will play in your event. Will they be responsible for execution only, strategy only, or a combination of strategy and execution? You will also need to screen DMCs to identify their work styles and determine if they will be compatible with your work style. In addition, be prepared to share important information with the DMC, such as why you are planning this meeting, how you and the stakeholders measure success, who is the audience, and — of course — what the budget allows.

We want to remind you that the key component to a successful DMC-to-client relationship is trust. Kendra has to know that her DMC partner will treat her clients and agency partners as their own. RVE is an extension of NORCAL Group’s brand and must deliver an unforgettable experience and anticipate the needs of its customers just as we would. This is why our tenured relationship has been so successful. RVE understands Kendra and NORCAL Group, and that allows her to focus on other areas of the event to ensure its success.

Here are some specific questions you can ask a DMC to help determine if they are a good fit for you, your company and your program:

• What’s your communication preference? For example, does the DMC prefer communicating over the phone, email or text? Most importantly, does that work for you, the meetings professional?
• What’s the typical workload for your DMC program manager? This can give you visibility into how many other events the DMC will be working on in addition to yours.
• How soon will I be assigned a program manager, and what does the team support look like on my end? These questions can help you figure out if you’ll have one point of contact or several, as well as how often your contact(s) will be on-site versus in the office. The last thing you want is to keep reaching out to your DMC point of contact and get nothing but out-of-office replies.
• Are there any standard practices that you do as a DMC that are different from a typical DMC? If so, can you describe them? Anything from a work style to a company philosophy is good to know up front, so you can decide if it will help or hurt your working relationship.

Once you find a DMC that will work well with you and your event, it can be the beginning of a beautiful partnership. Just make sure that expectations are clearly outlined, and the lines of communication stay open. Then see how much bigger and better your meetings and incentives can become.
Budgeting for Uncertainty

Experts Predict a Possible Downturn in the Second Half of 2020

By Kyle Jordan, Ed.M., MS, CAE, CMM, CMP

Every year, whether we want to or not, there comes a time when we must start working on our budgets. Budgeting allows us to create a spending plan to help us best achieve our financial goals for the upcoming fiscal cycle. However, what happens when you’re trying to create a budget in a year of potential economic uncertainty?

If you’ve been following some of the press, both industry-wide and otherwise, there have been gentle whisperings about the potential of an economic slow down and maybe even a little ‘r’ recession in 2020. Now, I’m not a fortune teller, but I’m concerned about budgeting for the 2020 economy, and it’s my responsibility to understand how economic fluctuations can impact our budgets and our budget forecasting.

Why Are We Talking About a Slowdown, or Little ‘R’ Recession?

While there are lots of potential causes for a possible slow down — trade wars, the impact of Brexit, possible instability of the oil supply and our own upcoming election cycle, to name a few — there are data points and trends to which we as meetings professionals need to pay attention.

Recently, news reports gave us our first real inside the industry insight of a possible slow down with the article, “Corporate Group Bookings Decline for 2020: Cvent Data.” The article, which focuses on the data from Cvent’s Group Business Outlook report, indicated that group bookings will continue to increase during Q1 and Q2 of 2020 before taking a negative turn in Q3 and remaining negative through the first half of 2021. Outside of our industry, the RV Industry Association reported in July that “the total number of RV shipments dropped by 23.2 percent in July compared to the previous year. The drop was the 12th-straight month of year-over-year declines, and 2018 was the first annual decline in RV shipments since 2009.”

So, what does this mean exactly, and why do we care if people are buying fewer RVs? Industry leaders like Michael Dominguez, president and CEO of Associated Luxury Hotels International (ALHI), have long been highlighting the record occupancy and demand, not only from the group business, but from the leisure and transient sectors, thus driving up rates. However, 2019 is the second year in a row where shipments of recreational vehicles to dealers have fallen, behavior which preceded the last three recessions. And we’re starting to see growth and demand slowing in the hotel market. So what does this mean exactly? With luxury purchases like RV’s slowing down and booking patterns reducing comparatively to the growth of inventory, we’re likely to see some stabilization and rate corrections in the markets (courtesy GBTA).

BUDGETING HACKS IN PREPARATION FOR THE SLOWDOWN

Every meetings professional has their own approach to budgeting, but here are some steps I’m taking to help lessen any significant hits on my expense line items in my 2020 budget.

•Short-term meetings (2020 meetings not yet booked). Play the waiting game: I’m holding off on booking meeting dates and consider executing those reductions.

•Review those contracts. Do you have any clauses in your contract that will allow you to proactively reduce your block or food and beverage commitment by an amount or percentage? If so, pay close attention to those dates and consider executing those reductions.

•Hope for the best and budget for the worst. Do you have an attrition or contingency line item in your budget? If not, consider adding one for 2020. We all hate the idea of paying attrition. However, in a down economy, everyone may make ends meet, including our supplier partners. And they may hold you to that attrition clause. Use your occupancy history to determine what amount of attrition you could be liable for and budget accordingly.

•Long-term meetings (already booked/contracted meetings). Use your history: Review your post-2009 recession data and numbers. Over the last few weeks, I’ve dusted off some of my predecessors’ spreadsheets, including budgets and expenses, to see what kind of hit we took in the most recent big ‘R’ recession. I can tell you, the numbers weren’t pretty, but those numbers have given me some insight into the behavior of my conference participants.

•Consider virtual. Not all meetings have to happen in person. One of the easiest ways to control some of your variable costs is to consider making your event virtual.

Kyle Jordan, Ed.M., MS, CAE, CMM, CMP is a meetings architect and association strategist, currently serving as the Director of Conferences and Meetings for the Financial Planning Association (FPA) headquartered in Denver, Colorado. Jordan is a Certified Association Executive (CAE), a Certified Meeting Professional (CMP), and recently completed his Certificate in Meeting Management (CMM). He is also a member of the FICP Education Committee. This article originally appeared on ficpnet.com. Visit ficpnet.com/blog.
FICP Executive Director Steve Bova on the State of the Insurance & Financial Meetings Industry

2020 INDUSTRY OUTLOOK

BY MAURA KELLER
There is a need in our meeting design for shorter presentations, more networking time, ‘wow’ or unique experiences, and creating emotional, long-lasting connections.

Q: What are the key takeaways you hope planners received at the conference?
A: While there was an unlimited number of takeaways for attendees in the breakout sessions offered throughout the event, three messages resonated from the main stage:
• That trends is the 1 thing that holds people back from accomplishing their dreams. Keynote speaker Ben Nemtin encouraged attendees to unbox their dreams, form a bucket list and begin to live up to their greatness.
• A Chiaradonna, a senior vice president at K&L Investments and a self-confessed former workaholic, shared his story of creating a journey to promote the integration of life and work.
• Kindra Hall taught attendees how to frame stories, rather than recite numbers and statistics, to capture attention and resonate with their audience—people remember stories.

Q: What new educational opportunities did FICP offer attendees at the conference?
A: FICP created Meeting Spots in an effort to customize and maximize interaction between meetings professionals and hospitality partners.

PHOTO BY ANTHONY JOHNSON / COURTESY OF FICP

Steve Bova, CAE, Financial & Insurance Conference Professionals (FICP) executive director, says the industry is on solid footing as long as face-to-face meetings remain a priority.

There is a constant challenge from corporate executives for meetings professionals to show that each event better than the previous one, but to use fewer resources. This supports the importance for meetings professionals to educate their executives about changes and trends impacting their meetings, and especially with respect to the budget. These are opportunities for conversations—an open door to be at the table, especially when there is fresh data to share that the industry makes available. Equally as important is communicating to attendees in an environment where attention spans are diminishing. You can expect that most attendees don’t read. According to a study by Microsoft, the average human being now has an attention span of eight seconds. This is a sharp decrease from the average attention span of 12 seconds in 2000. Another study showed that people are able to focus for about 17 minutes before losing interest. Hence, the reason for TED Talks. This shows there is a need in our meeting design for shorter presentations, more networking time, ‘wow’ or unique experiences, and creating emotional, long-lasting connections.

FICP held its 2019 Annual Conference in Austin, Texas in November. Steve Bova, FICP executive director, says the industry is on solid footing as long as face-to-face meetings remain a priority.

Q: Have there been any recent regulatory changes to the financial and insurance industry meetings, and if so, how will they affect the industry in 2020?
A: There are a lot of regulations that impact the industry, but we are unaware of any that are directly impacting meetings. However, last June, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) voted to adopt a package of rule-making and interpretations designed to enhance the quality and transparency of retail investors’ relationships with investment advisers and broker-dealers.

While the regulations were proposed to take effect in 2020, most companies already have measures in place that would put them in compliance with the proposed changes.

Q: What other challenges will financial and insurance professionals face in 2020?
A: There is a constant challenge from corporate executives for meetings professionals to show that each event better than the previous one, but to use fewer resources. This supports the importance for meetings professionals to educate their executives about changes and trends impacting their meetings, and especially with respect to the budget. These are opportunities for conversations—an open door to be at the table, especially when there is fresh data to share that the industry makes available. Equally as important is communicating to attendees in an environment where attention spans are diminishing. You can expect that most attendees don’t read. According to a study by Microsoft, the average human being now has an attention span of eight seconds. This is a sharp decrease from the average attention span of 12 seconds in 2000. Another study showed that people are able to focus for about 17 minutes before losing interest. Hence, the reason for TED Talks. This shows there is a need in our meeting design for shorter presentations, more networking time, ‘wow’ or unique experiences, and creating emotional, long-lasting connections.

A: This is one budget line that is not under intense scrutiny, and if so, it’s to ensure there are enough resources dedicated to this area. It’s not a hard sell, considering the environment in which we live. For example, “Our company has always had high security protocols,” says one FICP board member, who continued, “there may be more topics we cover—e.g., active shooter, etc.—but the attention to detail and making it a priority has always existed.”

Q: What are the budget opportunities you see ahead for the financial and insurance services meetings industry?
A: Several sources indicate budgets are increasing or leveling out, but not decreasing. Budgets generally increased slightly in 2019 over 2018; however, we are seeing signs of caution as 2020 budgets are created. Some are indicating concerns of an economic slowdown—not a recession but slower growth—which is prompting some companies to create scenarios during their budgeting process to anticipate upside and downside outcomes. Still, nearly 40% of meetings professionals are not adjusting their events in light of discussions around a possible economic slowdown.

A: First, 2019 was a record-breaker! Every conference presents opportunities that accentuate the uniqueness of the venue. For the first time, FICP partnered with the host convention & visitors bureau to offer a pre-event city tour attended by 30 meetings professionals. Visit Austin hosted an evening reception that highlighted the city, live music reputation. FICP attendees stepped right onto the dance floor during the evening networking opportunities.

Q: What encouraging signs do you see ahead for the financial and insurance services meetings industry?
A: According to the FICP Fall 2019 Pulse Survey, slightly more respondents are reporting increases in the size of business meetings being planned as compared to the spring 2019 survey; however, that growth has not yet returned to 2018 levels. With incentives and the number of business meetings, the majority of meetings professionals are noting conditions that remain the same. More of those at insurance-only firms reported increases than peers at other company types. For the majority of meetings professionals with risk managers as meeting owners and incentives, internal security teams were the colleagues who were reported as contributors, followed by legal teams.

Q: How did the 2019 Annual Conference differ from previous years?
A: This is one budget line that is not under intense scrutiny, and if so, it’s to ensure there are enough resources dedicated to this area. It’s not a hard sell, considering the environment in which we live. For example, “Our company has always had high security protocols,” says one FICP board member, who continued, “there may be more topics we cover—e.g., active shooter, etc.—but the attention to detail and making it a priority has always existed.”

There is a constant challenge from corporate executives for meetings professionals to show that each event better than the previous one, but to use fewer resources. This supports the importance for meetings professionals to educate their executives about changes and trends impacting their meetings, and especially with respect to the budget. These are opportunities for conversations—an open door to be at the table, especially when there is fresh data to share that the industry makes available. Equally as important is communicating to attendees in an environment where attention spans are diminishing. You can expect that most attendees don’t read. According to a study by Microsoft, the average human being now has an attention span of eight seconds. This is a sharp decrease from the average attention span of 12 seconds in 2000. Another study showed that people are able to focus for about 17 minutes before losing interest. Hence, the reason for TED Talks. This shows there is a need in our meeting design for shorter presentations, more networking time, ‘wow’ or unique experiences, and creating emotional, long-lasting connections.

A: While there was an unlimited number of takeaways for attendees in the breakout sessions offered throughout the event, three messages resonated from the main stage:
• That trends is the 1 thing that holds people back from accomplishing their dreams. Keynote speaker Ben Nemtin encouraged attendees to unbox their dreams, form a bucket list and begin to live up to their greatness.
• A Chiaradonna, a senior vice president at K&L Investments and a self-confessed former workaholic, shared his story of creating a journey to promote the integration of life and work.
• Kindra Hall taught attendees how to frame stories, rather than recite numbers and statistics, to capture attention and resonate with their audience—people remember stories.

Q: What new educational opportunities did FICP offer attendees at the conference?
A: FICP created Meeting Spots in an effort to customize and maximize interaction between meetings professionals and hospitality partners.

PHOTO BY ANTHONY JOHNSON / COURTESY OF FICP

Steve Bova, CCE, Financial & Insurance Conference Professionals (FICP) executive director, says the industry is on solid footing as long as face-to-face meetings remain a priority.
At the recent IMEX America SMART Monday session, the Society for Incentive Travel Excellence (SITE), Incentive Research Foundation (IRF), and FICP, along with research partner Oxford Economics, released the second joint study of the global incentive travel industry. The 2019 Incentive Travel Industry Index is the largest-ever survey undertaken in the incentive travel industry, providing not just a historical snapshot into the incentive travel industry, but also a predictive hypothesis of where it’s going.

In a panel session at the 2019 FICP Annual Conference, FICP members discussed the findings and how both meetings professionals and hospitality partners could leverage the data in executive-level discussions and for future incentive planning purposes. Key findings from the study included:

• An average spend per person on incentive programs of $4,508 in North America.
• An anticipated budget growth by 2022 of 5.9%, primarily due to increases in hotel-related spends. While overall budgets remain relatively flat according to other industry data, incentive travel budgets are growing.
• An increased emphasis on ‘soft power,’ even with senior management, four of the six top-rated benefits to companies of incentive travel were tied to areas such as improved engagement, improved retention, better employee relationship building between employees and management.

Q: In your opinion, what are the biggest new trends for financial and insurance industry meetings in 2020?

A: Another trend from the most recent Pulse Survey is that planners generally prefer to do their own negotiations. In fact, 79% of planners say they are doing their own negotiations, which directly speaks to FICP’s power of partnerships and relationships.

While anecdotal, it is assumed that meetings professionals use negotiation to demonstrate value, 78% of Pulse Survey respondents indicated they prefer to receive the best rate up front, while 61% of hospitality partners indicated they prefer to provide the best rate up front.

Q: How has technology impacted the financial and insurance industry meetings and what do you expect to hold in terms of use of technology to enhance meetings?

A: At Technology becomes more savvy over the years. It’s important for meeting professionals to follow these trends and make sure they are applying them to their programs. There is a lot to monitor, including mobile apps, facial recognition, traffic patterns and other innovative opportunities.

Finally, FICP announced that its 2022 Annual Conference will take place November 13-16 at the Omni Boston Hotel at the Seaport in Boston. The hotel, set to open in early 2021, is the largest hotel development in Boston in more than 10 years.

While the Annual Conference is the one time we can get together during the year, the key to meeting professional’s growth is to be engaged throughout the year in their industry and the association — to stay on top of trends and innovations, productivity-boosting tips and other skill-building information and to build a pipeline of future leaders.
These Destinations Are Sure to Please, No Matter the Time of Year

BY MAURA KELLER

When the snow starts falling and the temperature begins to plummet, many meeting planners’ thoughts turn to warmer all-season destinations for upcoming meetings and events. Whether a group plans to stay closer to home or to venture to an exotic, faraway destination, there are options to bring warmth to attendees all year long.

Lauren Grech, CEO and co-founder of LLG Agency & LLG Events of New York City, and an adjunct professor at New York University, has planned events in various all-season locations, including Florida, California, Mexico, Aruba and the Caribbean.

Grech says destination events in these all-season locales are a great choice for clients who are more laid back with their event planning, as they often won’t get to see the venue or destination beforehand, or meet all of their vendors in-person prior to the event.

“Planners and clients choosing a destination event should be adaptable, because there are a lot more factors involved, which might result in last-minute decisions or unforeseeable changes,” Grech says. “It’s also a great option for a more intimate meeting or event with select attendees, as you can limit the attendee count and increase the spend per attendee for a more exclusive experience overall.”

If a meeting planner opts for a destination event, they need to be sure to do research or collaborate with a local resource or destination event planner who understands what it takes to budget for an event in a desired location and in that corresponding currency, so they can allocate funds accordingly.

As Grech explains, the event criteria and logistics that it takes to execute an event in this area, include such things as: Sourcing a venue that has accessibility to a nearby airport or the transportation involved for the attendees; the design components that may be impacted by this locale, such as the availability of certain florals; and the strategies available for a rain date, or contingency plan in case something happens such as a natural disaster.

“I have planned, designed and executed destination events in many all-season destinations, in addition to conducting site visits and event evaluations in these locales: Mayakoba, Mexico; Newport Beach, California; the Virgin Islands; and even other, more far-flung sites such as Bora Bora,” Grech says. “The upside is that these locales offer the perfect opportunity to blend the event with memorable, bucket-list activities; unique, outdoor venues; or depending where you go, a special blend of new cultures.”

FLORIDA

Many venues in Florida cater directly to corporate meeting professionals to make their all-season meeting or event memorable. In fact, for many organizations, Florida has become synonymous with “all things meetings”—thanks to its vast array of resorts, meeting venues, warm weather and amenities that keep attendees coming back. When looking at beach destinations, Lauren Driggers, client experience consultant and meeting planner at TSYS in Columbus, Georgia, selected Naples, Florida because the area offered a quaint downtown area, unique beach setting among the mangroves, and one-of-a-kind experiences. Likewise some of Florida’s other ‘big draws’ include Palm Beach, Orlando, Fort Lauderdale and Miami — all of which offer ample opportunities to work and play.

“I chose the Naples Grande Beach Resort based upon the entire vibe the property emotes — the décor is impeccable, reflecting a modern sophistication, yet relaxed South Florida vibe,” Driggers says. Set on 23 waterfront acres on Florida’s Paradise Coast, Naples Grande Beach Resort boasts more than 83,000 sf of meeting and event space. The property’s second floor ballroom underwent a multimillion-dollar renovation late last year, which included a brand-new design, digital signage and custom lighting.

According to Driggers, it’s imperative to incorporate local elements whenever and wherever a meeting planner can — whether it’s through food selection, activity options or attendee gifts. “Naples is so charming and offers it all — it’s known for its high-end shopping, world-class culture and sophisticated dining scene, and offers unique activity options like Everglades airboat tours,” Driggers says. “Events today must go beyond just the traditional creative components — you have to bring new and different ideas to the table for
everything from agenda formation to activities to audio-visual.”

Orlando is known for its theme parks, but for financial and insurance meeting attendees, Orlando is considered a top meeting destination — drawing corporate attendees from near and far. In fact, Orlando leads the pack for meeting attendees, Orlando is considered a financial mecca of sorts, thanks to its Bank of America’s headquarters. But, venture further south and Miami’s Brickell neighborhood is an international banking center that offers the ideal locale for financial-based meetings and events. Of course, the benefits of hosting meetings in Miami are endless; not only does it boast a broad variety of meeting spaces, but also offers venues in ideal proximity to areas that can be explored when business is done. From elegant venues in historic settings to beautiful, sun-drenched spots that welcome relaxation, Florida is an exceptional option for financial-based meetings or conventions of any size.

CALIFORNIA

In the past two years alone, the meeting planners at Meetings Made Easy have booked advisory board meetings of 15 executives up to events for 3,000 attendees all over California. That’s one of the biggest draws of California — there are hotels and convention centers that can accommodate all budgets, program sizes and interests, from high-end corporate financial events to meetings and association programs with stricter budgets. “There’s more to have a great meeting than great weather, but it definitely helps,” says Sarah Buchbinder, a meetings group broker at Meetings Made Easy in Middleton, New Jersey. “When you host your events in California everyone wants to attend. It’s a destination that comes prepackaged with its own hype, so you don’t have to work as hard to create the FOMO — people get excited, which drums up attendance. This is a huge benefit for events whose revenue is dependent on attendance.”

Plus it’s easy to add on shoulder activities for families. As Buchbinder explains, if people feel they can leverage their business event into a family event, they’re more likely to take the time away from home and the office. Areas such as Anaheim have perfect opportunities for dinners on their own in areas such as the Garden Walk in Anaheim or Universal City Walk in Los Angeles. Logistically you can give your attendees lots of options while mini-maxing your event’s ROI.

It sounds cliché, but Buchbinder says meeting planners who have set their sights on California should think outside the box when it comes to activities. Here’s why: California is one of the best states as far as diversity of activities. Of course, in the north there is Oakland and San Francisco, and Napa, along with some of the best golf and wine cities. While Southern California is known for its beaches, surfing, celebrities and still more wineries.

People also forget you can ski in California. In the winter, you can have your sales conference in the morning in Huntington Beach, and you can be skiing at Big Bear in the afternoon.

“Since you’re in an all-season destination, make sure to highlight it,” Buchbinder says. How many ways can you incorporate the outdoors into your program? Residents having an afternoon sunset reception, can your team build up as a scavenger hunt around the city? Can you do a walking foodie tour to sample some of the local cuisine? What about bringing your entire board meeting onto the beach and having all your guests barefoot in the sand?”

Vanessa Loney, head of global planning at Blue Ribbon Events in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, is currently planning a multiday international conference attracting thousands of attendees from around the world. “Having never been to San Francisco or Oakland prior to my event, I had no idea the Bay Area had so many unique vistas with sweeping views of the bay,” Loney says. “With the weather being pretty consistent, you can enjoy the outdoor spaces with nothing more than a sweater or light jacket.”

Aside from outdoor venues and activities, with so many visitors frequenting the city, there are tons of amazing Michelin-starred restaurants and other top-notch food options. “Don’t forget to mention, Napa Valley and Sonoma are about an hour outside of the city, offering group excursion options.”

“This destination has enough to please everyone in an incentive group, conference or any event,” Loney says. “So you can utilize the outdoor spaces as you can. If you have a conference, consider having the exhibitors hall in an outdoor corridor or the welcome reception under the stars.”

MEXICO

So what are some of the ‘must-see’ warm travel spots? All-inclusive meeting options in Mexico continue to be the top choice for many attendees.

All-inclusive resorts offer an easy, no-worry experience with meals, beverages and activities included within the rate. And if attendees have children, there are a variety of activities to keep them busy.

“San José del Cabo’s Riviera Maya forest and the stunning waterways of the Caribbean, Hotel Xcaret Mexico is a wealth of meeting and event venues and amenities that will add to a sense of history and excitement to any size event. From the hotel’s Convention Center to its Mexican Hacienda, as well as a wealth of multifunctional spaces and private beaches, Hotel Xcaret Mexico is the preeminent all-season destination for meetings and events. Barcelo Hotels & Resorts offers a vast array of different resort options throughout Mexico. From Los Cabos to the Maya Rivera to Puerto Vallarta, the hotels offer a variety of meeting packages, depending on the chosen locale. For instance, the Barcelo Puerto Vallarta boasts a convention center along the coastal shoreline. In addition, attendees can relax on the white-sand beaches, revel in the charming towns or play a round of golf on nearby championship courses.

Of course, no discussion of Mexico would be complete without highlighting Cancun, a premier diving and snorkeling destination, situated along exotic coral reefs. In Cancun, attendees can explore the kaleidoscope of these multicolored gems. Delightful shopping, and sightseeing opportunities abound throughout this Mexican hot spot. Both Riviera Maya and Cancun are famous for their large-scale, all-inclusive resorts.

HAWAII

While it may be more distant, Hawaii has long been a favorite warm winter destination for meeting planners who recognize that the beaches and culture of Hawaii make a fantastic backdrop for meetings and events of all types. In addition to volcanoes, waterfalls and beaches aplenty, Hawaii boasts historic sites and indigenous Hawaiians traditions just waiting to be experienced. And while Hawaii offers a wealth of venue options, Aulani, A Disney Resort & Spa, can accommodate gatherings of all sizes, thanks to the resort’s 76,000 sf of beautiful outdoor space and a 21,000 sf conference center.

Hotel Xcaret México has a nearly 19,000 sf Convention Center, and its Xpiral Room covers nearly 19,000 sf.

“More than having a great meeting than great weather, but it definitely helps.”

SARAH BUCHBINDER
Meetings Group Broker
Meetings Made Easy

Barcelo Hotels & Resorts offers a vast array of different resort options throughout Mexico. From Los Cabos to the Maya Riviera to Puerto Vallarta, the hotels offer a variety of meeting packages, depending on the chosen locale. For instance, the Barcelo Puerto Vallarta boasts a convention center that can host up to 600 people, while the Barcelo Maya Grand Resort features 37 conference rooms, three theaters, and five business centers, allowing the hotel to host a variety of conferences, conventions or meetings in Mexico.

Although getting down to business may be the focus of a destination event in Mexico, financial and insurance attendees can also enjoy visiting Mexico’s Riviera Maya tourism district, just south of Cancun. Featured as a top winter, or anytime travel destination, this area has long been adored for its great value and ability to offer something for everyone. Attendees can explore ancient Mayan ruins, horseback ride through jungle mangroves, and snorkel exotic coral reefs. In Cancun, attendees can enjoy their entire board meeting into a family event, they’re more likely to take the time away from home and the office. Areas such as Anaheim have perfect opportunities for dinners on their own in areas such as the Garden Walk in Anaheim or Universal City Walk in Los Angeles.
attendees relax after a day of meetings. In the heart of Hawaii, Oahu is home to Hawaii’s capital, Honolulu — where the island’s art, culture and history come alive. The north side of Oahu features legendary beaches, charming surfside towns and tiny shops. Oahu’s Waikiki region is considered the ‘tropical Manhattan,’ and is home to vibrant hot spots that keep attendees coming back for more.

Does the idea of hula dancing on pristine beaches or volcano-hiking through shrouded rainforests seem like perfect ‘after meeting’ activities to offer attendees? Then Maui may be the ideal all-season destination for a group. As the second-largest island in this archipelago of volcanic landmasses, Maui features lush rainforests, eclectic small towns, world-class resorts and charming-bed-and-breakfasts. Attendees can enjoy sailing expeditions through iridescent waters, engage in a thrilling drive to the small coastal village appropriately called ‘Heavenly Hana’, or immerse themselves in Hawaii’s rich cultural history.

ISLAND DESTINATIONS

The natural beauty of the Bahamas stretches far and wide — occupying more than 700 islands in the Atlantic Ocean. And while the majority of those islands are uninhabited, meeting and event planners can hone in on 29 islands in the Bahamas where golf courses, resorts and tropical pleasures abound. Paradise Island is home to Atlantis, a luxurious destination for corporate and adventurous travelers. The ballrooms gracing Atlantis’ grounds can accommodate up to 4,000 resort guests and features the 50,000 sf of Imperial Ballroom, with more than 40,000 sf of pre-function space. The conference center can host up to 4,000 attendees and boasts 80 breakout rooms, three boardrooms, and a large staging area. It also has a banquet kitchen equipped with additional pantries and state-of-the-art facilities for conventions, board meetings, annual events, or other memorable trips for groups of all sizes. Flexible group packages can be developed to provide the ultimate work and relaxation program.

Located in Nassau, Bahamas, Grand Hyatt Baha Mar is another favorite destination of meeting and event planners. Its Baha Mar Convention, Arts & Entertainment Center doubles as an art gallery, featuring original works from Bahamian artists. Grand Hyatt Baha Mar features 200,000 sf of state-of-the-art, indoor and outdoor spaces for meetings and events looking to add a true Bahamian feel to the experience. In addition, Grand Hyatt Baha Mar offers more than 30 dining options, including: KATSUYA by Starck, COMMONWEALTH and COSTA.

A bit more exotic, all-season destination resorts throughout the U.S. Virgin Islands, including St. Thomas, St. John and St. Croix, as well as Aruba, offer meeting and event packages that many companies find enticing. And as new developments pop up in these locales, the region’s seasoned DMCs can help meeting and event planners find the ideal venue for a conference, meeting or event, while also orchestrating meaningful tours and activities to must-see attractions.

For attendees eager to explore the various islands that are playing host to their meeting or convention, the U.S.V.I. and Aruba offer a wealth of opportunities to explore this tropical paradise via off-road tours, horseback or on 4x4 vehicles.

STEPS TO TAKE

Obviously one of the major draws for these all-season locations is the beautiful, sunny weather that accompanies the ocean breezes and tropical landscapes. However, as we’ve seen with recent hurricane activity, it’s crucial that event professionals have strategies available for a rain date or contingency plan — in case something happens in the chosen destination such as a natural disaster.

Another thing that Grech says event planners should be aware of is that many of these locales can still host events, even if they’ve been hit by a recent hurricane.

“For example, some of the best-known resorts in the Bahamas’ 700-island chain, like Grand Hyatt Baha Mar, and Atlantis, remained unscathed by Hurricane Dorian — bringing tourism to these resorts will actually help speed up the country’s recovery by giving their economy that boost it needs during a crucial time,” Grech says. “This brings an added element to a meeting or event as well, by making it philanthropic and purposeful to aid an area of natural beauty back to full capacity.”

Grand Hyatt Baha Mar features 200,000 sf of flexible indoor and outdoor meeting and event space. Its Baha Mar Convention, Arts & Entertainment Center, which doubles as an art gallery, encompasses 82,000 sf.

"Bringing tourism to these resorts will actually help speed up the country’s recovery by giving their economy that boost it needs during a crucial time."

LAUREN GRECH
CEO and Co-Founder, LLC Agency & LLC Events
Adjunct Professor, New York University
A s in life, the only certainty in the world of meetings is — uncertainty. Change is inevitable and constant, even in the food arena. So, to be ahead of the culinary curve, keep reading for insight from in-the-know planners and gastronomic experts.

‘IT’ MARKS THE SPOT
What do turmeric, cauliflower, kombucha, fresh-pressed juices and milk alternatives have in common? According to Elise Kaiser, program manager with Bishop-McCann, LLC, in Lincolnshire, Illinois, an industry leader in producing meetings, incentive programs and events worldwide, these food items are among the latest ‘it’ ingredients being incorporated into meeting menus.

It’s a different world from those back-in-the-day, meat-and-potatoes meals, reluctantly accompanied by the sole vegetarian option of steamed vegetables. “Health trends are a huge component when selecting menus,” Kaiser says. “I worked on a program with 200 attendees and there were over 15 different dietary restrictions in just that small group.” As the planner strives to incorporate something for everyone, she’s found an easy way to do this is by selecting menus that can be custom designed, giving attendees the freedom to select their own food options. “It’s fun and allows them to be creative, but more importantly, it gives them a sense of security in knowing exactly what they’re eating.” The caveat, of course, relates to the pocketbook, as healthy, fresh food options are pricier — an important item to address with the client during budget review, which can translate to an additional $5 to $10 more per attendee.

But though it’s no longer an exclusive steak-and-au-gratin audience, it’s certainly not a healthy-all-the-time crowd either, as sometimes nostalgic, albeit heavier entrees can be found on today’s menus, but now with a twist. Kaiser elaborates with an example. “Instead of the typical beef Sloppy Joes, cole slaw and tater tots, you might see turkey Sloppy Joes with gourmet mustard, local barbecue sauce and grilled onions, accompanied by a kale and cabbage slaw with cranberries, a citrus vinaigrette and sweet potato tots.”
WASTE NOT, WANT NOT

If you’re troubled by the abundance of uneaten and discarded food associated with meeting events, you’re in the majority, as six in 10 meeting planners cite its reduction as one of their top priorities according to the most recent annual IACC Meeting Room of the Future report.

“Food waste is a huge concern,” says Bishop-McCann’s Kaiser. Her advice: Inquire with the venue about its policies. Are they able to donate any untouched food to local shelters? If this is not an option, reduce your guarantee by 10% to 15%. Generally, the venue will automatically make 3% more than what you guarantee.

Chef Joel Delmond
Chef Joel Delmond, Westin Mission Hills Golf Resort & Spa: After citing trends from savory yogurt to the introduction of a combo of tastes such as sour/salty, sweet/spicy, making the experience more ‘just a meal,’ the Rancho Mirage chef predicts, “Future food experiences will take attendees out of their comfort zones and be more diversified than ever before.”

More prognostications include grilling stations for the presentation of ethnic food and floor seating as opposed to table-chair dining.

Chefs Alan Ehrich and Mark LeJeune, Audubon Nature Institute: “The next food-oriented movement will most likely be one of convenience.” The duo elaborates that anything that can be brought to the client on their terms and at their convenience will see an increase in days to come.

THINK SALSA

When just north of Mexico in San Antonio, consider a salsa-making competition, suggests Vicki-Lynn M. Terpstra, senior marketing manager at PayneWest Insurance.

Consider a salsa challenge as a team-building event involving food, suggests Vicki-Lynn M. Terpstra, senior marketing manager at PayneWest Insurance.

Know your audience, Kaiser urges. “Food diversity and global cuisine are extremely important, even more so with an international attendee base,” she says. “They’ve flown hundreds of miles, sometimes thousands, just to attend a meeting and it’s important to be aware of their cultural and religious backgrounds.’”

Kaiser admits that with so many food diets out there, it’s impossible to appeal to them all. “We once had someone list ‘no fat’ as a dietary restriction. We can’t promise that, but we can make sure the menu has multiple salad options — serving the dressings, carbs and proteins on the side.” With respect to the vegetarian crowd, Kaiser deems a salad insufficient. Her advice is to offer one or two, substantial entrees.

Lastly, she advises incorporating the destination into your menu. “If you travel to Mexico, for example, odds are the fresh ceviche, barbacoa tacos and homemade guacamole and salsa are a better bet than an Italian pasta station.”

Same for regional microbrews, spirits and wines. Sticking with the Mexico theme, a tequila and mezcal tasting at the welcome reception is a fun way to sample new things that attendees might not be able to experience in their hometowns.

THINK SALSA

When just north of Mexico in San Antonio, consider a salsa-making competition, suggests Vicki-Lynn M. Terpstra, senior marketing manager at Billings, Montana-based PayneWest Insurance. Having selected this Texas city and the Hyatt Regency Hill Country Resort and Spa for the insurance company’s Network meeting event in the past, the planner provides details of this group activity: “This was the first time we’ve created an entire, on-site foodie experience, which was due to our confidence in the resort’s food and beverage team.”

Judged and guided by the resort’s executive chef, who suggested such eclectic challenges as pairing salsa with sugar cookies, the planner deems this event at the top of her attendees’ memories. “When we find good partners, like Hyatt properties, we go to them for the ideas. Let the masters do their craft.”

“Local” is Terpstra’s favorite trend. “We travel to different communities to be exposed to their regional cuisine. You don’t have to be a foodie to appreciate the difference in meals found in every corner of our country.”

She elaborates that as this group is typically on property taking care of business, there is little time to venture off site. Thus, her remedy for infusing local culture into corporate meetings is to serve some of the region’s noted dishes. Terpstra gives additional kudos to food demos where attendees are given the opportunity to learn cooking tricks and exclusive-to-the-area recipes.

Though plant-based proteins are universally popular these days, the reception of the PayneWest group for this movement has not been enthusiastic. However, the planner sees her attendees loving infused waters and their subsequent hydration, along with kombucha, quinoa and pickled veggies that have long been loved. “And as long as the masses love it, we will provide it.” Terpstra says, adding that the industry’s pairing of eco-friendly initiatives with healthy living has guided her and her company away from prepackaged foods toward fresher choices. “Fresh produce flies like hotcakes, and we are happy to pick options that offer a healthier meeting or event.”

For a blast to the past, Terpstra gives a shout-out to nostalgic foods. “Again, we look at food as part of the fun and having stations of food that take us back to our childhood is an excellent way of providing added-value entertainment.”

LEIT THE GOOD TIMES ROLL

As our meeting is held annually in New Orleans, we try to incorporate the spirit of the city with our food and beverage choices,” says Emily Coia, conference director for the New Orleans Investment Conference and COO of Metairie, Louisiana-based Jefferson Financial Inc., which has produced the conference of 1,000 attendees for more than 45 years.

“This year we’re offering mini mufﬁnetas, deviled eggs with crawﬁsh tails, king cake and pralines,” she elaborates. “The closing session, at the Hilton New Orleans Riverside, is also food forward with the addition of anahi poke station. Described as sushi-grade ahi, dynamite sauce, wasabi aioli, forbidden rice, seaweed salad, pickled ginger, furikake, ponzu and liquid nitro, this culinary combo boxes the checks of many of today’s ‘go-to’ ingredients. And as we have done year after year, morning break stations feature hot beignets, the city’s renowned French doughnuts — an everlasting favorite.”

BEYOND BEIGNETS

Executive Chef Alan Ehrich and Sous Chef Mark LeJeune, of the Audubon Nature Institute in New Orleans, elaborate on this city’s distinctive food offerings and changes in today’s epicurean landscape. “We are in southern Louisiana, and the majority of our menu reflects this,” Ehrich says. However, the chefs expand on current trends, mentioning interest in Indian and Asian cuisines, anything vegan or vegetarian along with more green initiative-oriented menus — sustainability, farm to table, non-GMO and environmentally sound considerations.

With respect to the role of food as a connector, conversation starter and immersive experience, LeJeune says, “We think that the food does that on its own, but the family style meeting will add another layer of ‘wow’.”

Consider a salsa challenge as a team-building event involving food, suggests Vicki-Lynn M. Terpstra, senior marketing manager at PayneWest Insurance.
format that most of our clients opt for certainly helps with group interaction. In addition, the creation of new and inventive items presented in an action station allows us to bring people together.”

FROM MIDDLE AMERICA TO THE MIDDLE EAST

Across the country, Joel Delmond, executive chef at The Westin Mission Hills Golf Resort & Spa in Rancho Mirage, California, gives a breakdown and the prognosis of food trends he sees. “Super foods, healthy fats and fermented and pickled foods will remain strong, as will kefir and fruits fermented and pickled foods will remain strong, as will kefir and fruits. We are seeing a Global influence on menus. And, I feel as a chef that instead of getting frustrated by the growing number of dietary-restricted diners, we should embrace a healthier cooking culture in all of our cuisine.”

When asked what he considers today’s ‘it’ ingredients, he responds: “Though I try to steer clear of ‘it’ ingredients and introduce diners to new and exciting experiences, I think in my circle of chef friends, we all have a sunchoke dish on our menus. In the past, ingredients like sunchoke were looked upon as a dish’s star component. Now the trend is to take what was typically considered a component and make it its own menu item.”

With respect to the meat-substitute trend, however, he offers caution. “These aren’t exactly healthier options when talking about imitation meats and cheeses. It frustrates me to see vegetarians and those on plant-based diets opting for ultra-processed meat substitutes full of chemicals. If you want the flavor and texture of beef or cheese, I think you’re better off eating the real thing.”

He concludes with wisdom delved from his galley — insight he shares with planners: “In my opinion, over the last five years the whole restaurant scene has begun to realize that these dietary restrictions and plant-based lifestyle choices aren’t going anywhere. In order to be better chefs and restaurateurs, we need to adapt to the trends. As I’ve adapted, I’ve found myself cooking and thinking about food differently and in turn, have become healthier in and out of the kitchen.”

Bon appetit!

**DRAW OUTSIDE THE LINES!**

In an action station, any food event can be enhanced by creativity. So, tap your right-brain juices and have fun.

Chef Christopher Gentile, Rancho Bernardo Inn: “I’ve noticed a big trend of extra-large meat and cheese boards created directly on top of farm tables, with fewer plates and inedible garnishes. Food is beautiful and this makes it the focal point, as opposed to the plating or floral arrangements.”

Elise Kaiser, Bishop-McCann: Consider a food wall — a wooden wall with holes. “The servers stand behind the wall, with only their arms extended, and appetizers in each hand. The audience thinks it’s a piece of art until the arms move. It’s guaranteed to get a laugh from attendees.”

Chefs Alan Ehrich and Mark LeJeune, Audubon Nature Institute: Inventive and creative presentations of the food are important as the food. The New Orleans chefs advise ‘participation’ of attendees. “The presentation of the food in a deconstructed manner allows diners to be interactive and involved in building the end product, aka their meal.”

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Gentile, of AVANT, at the Rancho Bernardo Inn, uses fresh herbs picked from the inn’s garden.
ny experienced meeting planner will tell you that no matter what budget you have to work with — large or modest — cutting costs is always top of mind. There’s a reason that cost cutting repeatedly comes up in education sessions across the meetings industry. It’s important, and planners are always devising creative ways to keep costs down while keeping the quality and value of the meeting experience up.

Darci M. Motta, CMP, CITE, CIS, senior conference manager with CSAA Insurance Group in Walnut Creek, California, says there are elements she always considers.

“The three primary meeting elements we look at in terms of cost savings are: destination/venue, food and beverage design and A/V design. We also educate our meeting hosts on how to be more budget-conscious in their meeting design decisions. For meetings that don’t require accommodations and wouldn’t leverage the added benefits of a hotel environment, we transition to conference centers or alternative meeting venues,” she says. “Transitioning small day meetings to conference centers maintains a reasonable per-person price, while still including F&B and basic A/V. For local day meetings, we also innovate to leverage alternative venues such as indoor basketball courts, libraries and community centers.”

For multiday and larger programs, she says, “We carefully consider the added value of a hotel. If our group will be in meetings all day, why send them to a resort, and pay for resort and other ancillary fees that won’t benefit the attendees? Similarly, why host a meeting at a destination that experiences high transient business and charges accordingly, yet guests won’t be able to fully enjoy? Thoughtfully matching programs with the appropriate venue is an eye-opener for our hosts, and opens the door for real cost-saving opportunities.”

Motta says that once the appropriate destination/venue is identified, it’s time to communicate with CSMs and A/V partners to make smart F&B and A/V design choices. “Narrowing buffet choices, asking the chef for alternative protein options that may help reduce per-person pricing, eliminating bottled water and transitioning to large-format water stations are just a few of our tactics.”

Similarly, she says, “When reviewing A/V, we ask lots of questions to make sure we’re down to ‘need-to-haves’ and not paying for ‘nice-to-haves.’ A simple example includes bringing our own slide-show remote controls instead of renting. When compounded over multiple meetings, this small attention to detail can pay big expense-management dividends.”

The trick for planners is to be able to cut costs without compromising the equally important goal of creating successful, memorable meetings with value. Motta says it can be done.

“It’s a balance; a planner can be cost conscious and create memorable experiences. It’s really how we event professionals showcase our true worth and skill. Partnering with our hosts to identify the goals and objectives of their programs and guiding them through thoughtful choices to identify the location, environment and meeting design to best address their needs — without overspending — is where planners shine as strategic business partners.”

When it comes to devising creative cost-cutting tactics, planners are highly skilled. But, sometimes tried-and-true is the best approach, and planners have to know which tactic works best in which situation.

“It may not be the most creative tactic as many planners leverage this approach, but finding out what precedent in-house groups planned for meals and A/V, and mirroring these choices can generate significant savings without sacrificing the experience. In fact, this can be a way to get more for even less than was originally budgeted,” Motta notes.

Of course, negotiating is a critical skill for planners because negotiating can factor in multiple times before contracts are ever signed, particularly with vendors. “Be curious! Ask questions! Be transparent with your CSM about what portions of the buffet you absolutely need and what portions of the buffet you can compromise on,” Motta advises.

“It can only help to keep your budget tight. Share your agenda, and clearly articulate the time your attendees will be in meetings, then ask for a corresponding cost reduction on resort fees.
There are usually places where a hotel can offer attrition clauses, and don’t sign away your way out.

Thedecor that may charge lower rates. And if you’re planning to do a lot of things, it can help defray your décor costs.

ON-SITE, ask the hotel to store your glasses unless asked.

When it comes to transportation, Squeglia says she ended up lowering her overall spend for that meeting by empowering the chef to design menus that minimized the food choices while showcasing to the attendees an example of thinking differently. “The food still looked wonderful and tasted delicious, and this unorthodox approach reinforced the theme for attendees in an unexpected way,” she says. Additionally, our behind-the-scenes cost savings further reinforced the value of taking an unexpected approach to events.

When it comes to transportation, many planners are finding that costs can be cut by leveraging ride-share event codes. “Attendees want the flexibility to move how and when they want, and creating geo-fenced codes provides this flexibility, while ensuring the trips remain event-related,” Motta says. “This is also an important consideration when alcohol may be consumed. Ride-sharing even allows more attendees to get home safely after a local event and are more cost-effective than having to book a guest room.”

As for speakers, it’s always nice to imagine you can book that uber-popular celebrity — the one that comes with a hefty fee — but most expensive is not necessarily best. “It goes back to having a deep understanding of the goals and objectives of your project. You can often find a homegrown talent that provides a new and engaging perspective without the big price tag. You can also check out local TEDx events, colleges and speaker series. Engage your C-suite and execs; they may have a connection at another company and an opportunity for a speaker swap may present itself.”

F&B is a major budget expense, especially in this day and age of multiple allergies, preferences and dietary requirements necessary for cultural reasons.

“First and foremost,” Motta says, “you need to know your group. You need to know what the needs are so you’re not trying solve for a demand that doesn’t exist. Once you identify the actual needs of your group, engaging the chef in an honest and frank conversation can be very beneficial.

We hosted a meeting with a theme of disruption and a scrappy, curious mindset. I approached the venue with the idea of reducing waste by showcasing ‘imperfect’ produce and using our F&B design to echo some of our atypical, thought-provoking themes.”

When it comes to planning the menus, Squeglia works closely with hotels to customize menus where possible, especially if she has budget limitations. And like Motta, she advises transparency.

“The budget doesn’t have to necessarily be per meal,” she points out. “You can work with the hotel to say that the budget is $250 per person for all three meals and see what they come back with. If you work with the hotel closely, and are transparent with your budget parameters, they can partner with you to provide the best value for your budget.”

Décor also lends itself to cost savings. “It depends on the type of event you’re planning,” Squeglia says. “In some cases, the venue and/or hotels have very nice house linens and centerpieces that may help defray you decor expenses. If you’re hosting a smaller dinner as part of a big program, using a private dining room in one of the hotels’ restaurants may be less expensive and give your guests more food choices vs. having it in a smaller banquet room. Private dining rooms also typically need fewer choices at meals.

The meeting room and meeting room Wi-Fi, resort fees and discounts on spa, F&B and A/V — typically at least 10%. There are also complimentary suite upgrades, discounted staff rooms and discounted or complimentary parking. Even though urban hotels may not be able to offer a deal on parking, Squeglia says it’s always worth asking.

In addition, she suggests, “Ask for cumulative attrition and at least 20%, as well as one comp per room 40 utilized.”

Complimentary meeting space with an F&B minimum can also be a negotiated cost savings. “There are times when I’ll increase my F&B minimum if I know I can meet it to avoid room rental costs,” she notes.

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However, being important is the business or event. Motta advises following the mirroring approach suggested for menus and A/V. “By partnering with a speaker’s bureau to find out if there’s a desirable keynote speaker who’s already scheduled to be in town and could appear for a reduced fee.”

Like Motta, Squeglia says that one of her best cost-cutting tactics isn’t necessarily creative, but it’s effective. “This may sound obvious, but I think the key to lowering costs is to pay attention to every detail on price, don’t be afraid to question a cost or fee and ask for discounts. I also think being transparent about your budget expectations from the beginning is very helpful for both sides of the partnership, supplier and planner.”

Transparency, in fact, comes into play throughout the planning process as does communicating with respect. “It’s a partnership,” Squeglia emphasizes. “It’s impossible for a planner to be successful without our hospitality colleagues, including DMOs, hotels, speaker bureaus and so on. A collaborative approach will always benefit you in all aspects, including managing costs.”

Planning well ahead of time will also help. “It’s so important to plan as much as you can in advance and anticipate situations as much as possible,” Squeglia says. “When you have a lot of last-minute requests, that’s when costs start adding up and you put yourself in a position that you have no choice but to pay the expense.”

Squeglia also believes ride sharing is a good way to save on transportation costs. “I worked with a client on a large-scale broker forum. The total guest count was 350, 250 brokers and 100 internal employees. In planning the round-trip airport transfer, we arranged sedan service for the top company executives and brokers. For the internal employees, we set up a corporate account with Uber and it was a significant savings.”

What happens when a planner really feels a larger budget is important? Is asking a client or CEO an option? That depends. “Your argument for a larger budget typically directly aligns with the goals and objectives of the meeting,” Squeglia says. “If you can show the value of the additional expense and how it will enhance the outcome of the program, most of the time it will get approved.”

Most planners are in agreement when it comes to the top ways to cut costs without impacting quality. Like the planners above, one CMP and an FICP board member names A/V, meeting-room rentals and F&B among the areas to negotiate, and suggests that sustainability and cost savings align with choices such as eliminating bottled water and ‘going green’ with water stations.

There are usually places where a planner can offer attrition clauses, and don’t sign away your way out.

Thedecor that may charge lower rates. And if you’re planning to do a lot of things, it can help defray your décor costs.
Meeting room rentals are generally negotiable with an F&B minimum and A/V is negotiable whether with the in-house provider or a third-party provider," he says. "Food and beverage savings are possible if you’re agreeable to some flexibility in your menu selections — possibly by offering to overlap food requirements with another group or allowing the chef to make suggestions based on a certain price point.”

In addition, he says, being flexible with dates can be a good way to save. “You’re often able to get lower rates if you have some flexibility around pattern or the ability to shift dates to fill a hole. Sometimes you may be able to negotiate additional concessions as well.”

As for keeping costs down while maintaining quality, he says, “I think planners just have to think a little bit differently and not get stuck in the ‘that’s how we’ve always done it’ rut. By doing many of the things mentioned above, they can still have a very successful program while reducing costs.”

An example of thinking a little differently, he cites an upcoming event. “We’re doing a CSR activity at the event, and our CR department is going to pay the admission fees for the participants. We’re doing that instead of paying a facility fee for that session.”

Another tactic he used is related to an incentive dinner. “We gave each attendee a stipend to enjoy dinner at their leisure. It gave the attendees the freedom to customize what they were going to do, and it saved on décor and entertainment expenses. We provided a concierge-style service to assist in making arrangements as well as transportation to a central area in the city.”

“The larger your piece of business, the more concessions you can negotiate.”

Jennifer C. Squella, CMP
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RLC Events

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Another dining tactic: “When it comes to things like food stations, we guarantee based upon a number that’s lower than the full head count. Not every attendee is going to eat from every station, so it’s pretty safe to provide lower numbers on things like a crudité, seafood station, etc.”

Not surprisingly, he emphasizes that planning ahead is almost always best. “We plan far ahead for our incentive programs, more for availability than for cost savings, although planning further ahead can certainly have benefits from a cost perspective as well. Hotels are looking to build a base of groups and then layer in their transient business, so there are benefits to being early in the booking window. Often times with smaller groups, however, hotels won’t take the business too far in advance as they don’t want to be seen as a more profitable piece of business. In these cases, it’s sometimes more financially beneficial to book shorter term.”

Echoing the others, he notes that providing ride sharing is a good alternative to traditional ground transportation. “For some of our internal meetings, we encourage the use of ride-sharing services. For others, we group arrivals together within a certain ‘window’ of time that we feel is reasonable, based on the location that they’re flying into. And utilization of airport properties helps eliminate the need for ground transportation for those meetings where easy in/out access is desired.”

Which speaker to choose is relative to the goals of the meeting, but he says there are some really great speakers who come at a lower price point. “You sometimes have to pay a bit more if you’re looking for someone who has name recognition/cachet; however, even those higher-priced speaker fees are also negotiable. If you’re able to find speakers within the meeting destination, for example, they may be more agreeable to a lower fee because they can get in and out in the same day.”

As for asking for a larger budget, he says that, too, is possible. “Very often I’m successful if the ask is related to an expense that will enhance the program. It just needs to be presented properly.”

At the end of the day, he’s clear on his best advice to new planners on one important way to cut costs. “Don’t be afraid to ask/negotiate. Hotels are generally eager to earn the business and don’t want to lose out to a competitor.”

Bottom line: There are many ways to cut costs if planners are willing to negotiate, be transparent and think creatively — but keeping the goals of each meeting in mind is the framework for every decision.

Since not every attendee is going to eat from every station, provide a guarantee based upon a number that’s lower than the full head count.
Known for its vibrant nightlife and idyllic music scene, New Orleans is also a beacon of sorts for meeting and events of all sizes. Lauren Caselli, owner of Bozeman, Montana-based Lauren Caselli Events, orchestrated a spectacular meeting in New Orleans for about 200 people during the off-season month of January.

In New Orleans, there are many activities that can be done—from active events to tours to food experiences. From a tour of the swamp to the floats for Mardi Gras, Caselli arranged for guests to enjoy a variety of local tours as well as amazingly fun activities. “And we barely ever needed bus transportation. Our guests loved the option to walk from the hotel to bars, restaurants and activities. We had lots of surprises throughout the weekend, including a second line parade, even for corporate events. We did a second line parade, from our conference to an external lunch location, and people were amazed at how fun it was. They were greeted by the thunderous sounds of a 30- to 40-piece marching band. People had a blast, because it was so unique.”

“This mentality extends to many of the city’s venues as well, including brand-new The Sazerac House as well as our long-standing partners like The Sugar Mill and The Chicory. New Orleans’ venues offer unique settings, and the opportunity for unlimited creativity to bring local culture and inspiration to your attendees,” Turner says. “New Orleans has a long-standing history of world-class venues, hotels and attractions, a walkable downtown and a rich culture that will inspire and energize the meeting experience for your attendees, exhibitors and stakeholders.”

**IDYLLIC VENUE SELECTIONS**

Unique settings are exactly what Crystal Irlandez, customer experience manager for Naperville, Illinois-based Infogix, was looking for when she recently planned her company’s annual customer leadership council event at the Omni Royal Orleans. At this event, Infogix hosts the company’s best customers, where they meet to share the company’s future road map, learn what customers’ needs are, and network and collaborate amongst their customer base. “We always look for ‘city-esque’ locations. Our customers love what we have to offer in learning more about our company, but like to unwind after our sessions and explore the city they are in,” Irlandez says. “For many, they do not travel for work or personal pleasure, so it’s a nice way to see the city.

**New Orleans Continues to Shine for Planners and Attendees**

**BY MAURA KELLER**

The Mercedes-Benz Superdome dominates the skyline of New Orleans. The destination remains among the top places for planners to host conventions and events.
New Orleans is world-renowned for its unique celebrations — highlighted by Mardi Gras — and its distinct music, art, architecture, culture and delectable cuisine.

Hotel, has been playing host to a myriad of meetings and events for more than a century. From foreign leaders, to presidents, to global business leaders,

The Roosevelt has housed a wealth of individuals who cherish the traditional, classic elements. The decadent interior design of the hotel, including interconnecting ballrooms, hosting from 800 to 1,200 attendees and 27 private meeting rooms.

In a city with world-renowned celebrations, distinct music, art and delectable cuisine, Hyatt Regency New Orleans is another premier hotel destination hosting some of the Crescent City’s most prestigious meetings and events. The hotel, in the heart of downtown and adjacent to the Mercedes-Benz Superdome, Smoothie King Center and Champions Square. This hotel features guest rooms with breathtaking city views, and 200,000 sf of flexible function space including the largest hotel meeting and exhibition space in New Orleans. The hotel also offers contemporary and luxurious service, including four blocks from the Canal Street shops and the French Quarter, attendees can engage in the favorite hot spots of the city.

The most celebrated, glamor hotel in New Orleans, The Roosevelt is a century-old hotel that continues to be a favored destination for small to large groups, with more than 35,000 sf of space, including a grand ballroom that can accommodate more than 800 guests, two courtyards and an intimate Library Lounge. Perhaps the most celebrated, glamorous hotel in New Orleans, The Roosevelt has housed a wealth of individuals who cherish the traditional, classic elements. The decadent interior design of the hotel, including interconnecting ballrooms, hosting from 800 to 1,200 attendees and 27 private meeting rooms.

In addition, Hyatt Regency New Orleans’ culinary team and a professional event planner will work with meeting planners to fuse the best of New Orleans culture into each event. Whether it’s spicing up a lunch with traditional creole cuisine or adding a three-piece jazz band for an authentic welcoming experience.

On Canal Street on the cusp of the historic French Quarter, the Sheraton New Orleans Hotel offers meeting planners more than 105,000 sf of flexible space for events up to 2,600. The hotel’s guest rooms feature floor-to-ceiling windows and treetop views of the French Quarter, Mississippi River and downtown.

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RENOWNED CONVENTION CENTER

The ENMCC has been freshly renovated, offering the quintessential conference center experience, complete with New Orleans' vibes and elements throughout, including traditional New Orleans' cuisine, old-time jazz music and a wealth of entertainment elements to make the center a culturally rich destination.

The convention center recently embarked on a $557 million, five-year modernization plan that will transform the attendee experience, including reimagined meeting rooms, restrooms and public spaces. It consistently ranks in the country's top 10 of facilities that hold the most conventions and trade shows annually. Just steps away from the convention center, attendees can enjoy the world-famous French Quarter.

Adjacent to the convention center, the Hyatt Place New Orleans/Convention Center is close to the Mississippi Riverwalk. The hotel offers an all-inclusive meeting package that includes room rental, food and beverage, as well as audio-visual needs and is the ideal location for those visiting the convention center.

ACTIVITIES APLENTY

For those meeting planners who want to integrate play as well as work into a meeting, New Orleans offers something for everyone. Famous for its nightlife, music scene and shopping, New Orleans is teeming with historic gems and contemporary cultural experiences. Dating back to 1718, the city’s French Quarter is the oldest neighborhood and is steeped in history and heritage. Home to awe-inspiring historic buildings, cathedrals and famous jazz clubs, the French Quarter is a ‘must see’ attraction.

The area’s historic Garden District is also sure to please. This famous neighborhood is home to immaculate gardens, preserved antebellum mansions, renowned Lafayette Cemetery No. 1, and tree-lined streets.

Of course, New Orleans has long been synonymous with Mardi Gras, which happens every Carnival season starting Twelfth Night on January 6 and culminating on Fat Tuesday, the day before Ash Wednesday. If meeting or event attendees visit New Orleans at a time other than the designated time of Mardi Gras, they can visit one of the Mardi Gras-centric museums and workshops and see where floats are stored, lavish costumes are on display and Mardi Gras Indians are celebrated.

And because New Orleans is located below sea level, its well known above ground cemeteries are both historic and beautiful. Elaborate marble chambers grace these sacred grounds and visitors can enjoy guided tours or explore on their own.

The majority of New Orleans cherished attractions are within walking distance of the city’s downtown and convention districts, as well as the French quarter — offering attendees the opportunity to wander amid this historic area and revel in its charm.

And for those visiting New Orleans with their family in tow, the new Louisiana Children’s museum in New Orleans City Park recently opened its state-of-the-art facility. Situated in the heart of City Park, this $47.5 million facility features interactive educational exhibits, an expansive, mighty Mississippi water exhibit, literacy center, and outdoor amenities including decks, bridges, edible gardens, a floating classroom and interpretive wetlands.

New Orleans has festivals and events year-round. Attendees are sure to find something to do to unwind after a long day of meetings or other activities no matter which time of year they visit the city.

Our long-time strengths of world class assets and walkability, combined with our profound commitment to you to forge a partnership that drives unparalleled success in producing an energizing experience for your executives, exhibitors, and attendees have been reimagined.

The result...meetings that exceed your attendance, financial and business goals and imprint memories of experiences talked about for years.

Choosing New Orleans is a win for you! Call us at 877-366-7425 or visit NewOrleans.com/Meetings to book.
If America’s first visitors was the crew helmed by Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de León in 1513, then it could be said that Florida has been playing host for longer than any other state. While the explorer didn’t venture far beyond the swaying palms and silken sands lining the coast, the visitor infrastructure that followed in his wake has blossomed — particularly for meeting and incentive groups.

Today’s ‘Sunshine State’ avails an impressive variety of backdrops — awe-inspiring or intimate, and locations ranging from sleepy to downright buzzy — truly something for almost every style of gathering and budgetary consideration. And when it’s time for a breather, meeting planners will find Florida replete with water sports options and theme parks, beachcombing and wildlife viewing, along with a climate that invites alfresco events year-round.

“What’s great about Florida is the wide variety of options,” says Angie Nelson, regional vice president, Southeast, for event management firm PRA. The office is in Oakland Park, Florida. “It all depends on the experience you want to offer your attendees. You have city options where you’re not on the beach, but it’s nearby. You have the main convention destinations; and then there are the smaller, more incentive-oriented beach resorts.”

Nelson adds: “A lot of our clients alternate West Coast and East Coast every year, and that’s OK. But in Florida you could pick a different destination each time and go for multiple years in a row.”

And a variety of options was what was needed for a partner retreat PRA handled recently on behalf of a financial industry client. Attendees had a choice of about 20 different destinations around the country, including six in Florida — more than any other state. The options, which drew an average of 300 guests each, included Palm Beach, Naples, Amelia Island, Key Biscayne, Miami’s South Beach and Orlando.

“The client chose Loews Portofino Bay Hotel at Universal Orlando for their family program,” Nelson says. “They wanted to capitalize on the city for the theme parks.”

Located adjacent to the Universal Studios Florida entrance, the 750-room Portofino Bay emulates its namesake Italian seaside town, replete with cypress trees, cobblestone streets and gelato stands. The hotel features 42,000 sf of meeting space, including the 15,000-sf Tuscan Ballroom. But events like the one Nelson handled are all about the theme parks, and guests staying at Portofino Bay get a leg up with early park admission to The Wizarding World of Harry Potter and select attractions at Universal’s Volcano Bay water park.

“You know what you’re going to get in Orlando — you’re going to lose people to the parks,” Nelson suggests. “For the adults-only destinations, they chose beach properties around the state that offered both meeting space and relaxation. Florida was ideal for this as the airlift is generally affordable and there are plenty of direct flights, even for the smaller destinations.”

In Miami, the client chose the 1 Hotel South Beach, a beachfront property that incorporates art and sustainability into its upscale offerings. More subdued than some South Beach spots, the hotel's unique indoor and outdoor event spaces include a rooftop pool deck, a private beach club and a 6,500-sf ballroom with a 20-foot green wall of living moss.

Three Ritz-Carlton hotels pampered the financial client’s attendees

Photo courtesy Angie Nelson
Loews Portofino Bay Hotel at Universal Orlando features 42,000 sf of meeting space, including the 15,000-sf Tuscan Ballroom.

Photo courtesy Angie Nelson
The Ritz-Carlton, Naples

Everything From Sandy Beaches to Thrilling Theme Parks

BY DAVID SWANSON
Florida offers a variety of resorts, such as the Ritz-Carlton, Naples, two-year-round activities such as golf, and meeting facilities such as the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando, bottom.

at Amelia Island, Key Biscayne and Naples.

“These might not be the biggest cities, but they’re really pretty destinations with great beachfront hotels,” Nelson says. A priority for the client was cities that had a range of activities within 20 minutes of the hotel. “Restaurants for dine-around venues, unique venues for an off-site dinner event, and local tours needed to be ample in order to entertain the attendees during the program.”

The Ritz-Carlton, Naples is a distinguished landmark that includes a spa with 30 treatment rooms and two pools, one of which is designated for adults only. The hotel features more than 42,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting space, including a 10,140 sf ballroom.

For one evening dinner the client opted to take the group to NGALA Wildlife Preserve as Tommy Bahamas and Roy’s Bistro, respectively.

“In post-event client surveys, we sometimes get negative feedback about staying in a hotel the whole time and not being able to explore the destination.” Nelson says. “A lot of our clients want to send groups outside, and with general sessions and other events, evening is usually the best time to send them out in groups of 30 to 40. But clients also want local flavor, and they look for local restaurateurs to provide attendees unique experiences that they cannot get anywhere else, a place you can’t go to when you’re at home.”

Nelson adds: “Naples has a selection of local favorites, but they’re either pretty small or they don’t have a private room. Only the big-name chains seem to have the flexibility and space for group dining.”

Nationally known venues such as Tommy Bahama and Roy’s have the private space Nelson needed, along with quality dining, but it represented a compromise for the group.

“Eau Palm Beach has set itself apart,” he explains. “They treat you like family. On the last day of our meeting, when there are issues up north with weather, we’re extremely accommodating with an extra night, or late checkout. Any of the managers who come to one of our meetings for the first time, comes away saying it’s a completely different experience. They deal with a lot of our competitors with the same type of meetings, and their impression of this one is absolutely favorable. After the fact, a lot of these people come down to Eau Palm Beach on vacation.”

Allen closes by paying the ultimate compliment to the resort.

“I liked it so much for the meetings that I ended up vacationing there at least a couple times a year,” he says. “Then, my wife and I ended up buying a place just a half-mile apart.”

For most meeting planners, Flor- ida’s major event destination lies in the center of the state, and Orlando has been ranked by Event at the number one destination for meetings and events in the U.S. for the last five years in a row. Orlando hums along with 265 venues of the water. Barbara Rodriguez at the resort works with our meeting planner, and she has been a part of these meetings going back five years. There’s been seamless execution, and all of our meetings are extraordinarily well run. She’s phenomenal.”

Allen says Eau Palm Beach’s dining has been “consistently excellent. They have four different dining options, and they are all superb.”

The resort’s accommodations and common areas are designed with a ‘joie de vivre’ that enlivens, rather than settling for tired resort clichés. Last year Eau Palm Beach completed a face-lift for its 30,000 sf of meeting and event space. The upgrades included state-of-the-art LED lighting, a new sound system and electronic reader boards.

“We definitely need to be able to hold 50-100 plus people for our meetings,” Allen says. “They have multiple options for meeting rooms, some with beautiful features a 42,000 sf spa, which Allen says many of the spouses attending will utilize, stressing the level of service his attendees receive.

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Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa last year completed a face-lift for its 30,000 sf of meeting and event space. The upgrades included state-of-the-art LED lighting, a new sound system and electronic reader boards. The resort also features a 42,000 sf spa, a fitness center and rooftop cabanas.

Ken Allen, vice president, Invest- ment Research for Prudential Finan- cial’s annuity business in South Palm Beach, Florida, was equally effusive about this location. Allen has held a three-day, quarterly mutual fund board meeting here several times annually in past years. “I’ve been associated with this board for about 10 years, and early on we held our meetings where our managers were,” Allen says. “We had individuals coming from Connecticut, New Jersey, Illinois and a couple other places, and during winter we kept running into flight delays. About six years ago we decided to move our meetings to Florida. We started out in Fort Lauderdale, but unfortunately it wasn’t the best service experience that we would have hoped for — so we looked at other options.”

He continues: “One of our meeting planners did an extensive search, from Miami up to West Palm Beach, and all the big brands were looked at — The Breakers, Ritz-Carlton, and Four Seas- ons. She got in contact with Eau Palm Beach and was blown away by the level of service she received. We started with one or two meetings, then moved it to three each year. When you put the complete package together — service, price and location — Eau Palm Beach is truly spectacular.”

“What’s great about Florida is the wide variety of options. It all depends on the experience you want to offer your attendees:”

ANGIE NELSON Regional Vice President, Southeast JADA

“I appreciated that the destination was a wide variety of options available. Nelson says. “It sits on pristine beaches, where guests can rub elbows with the rich and famous of Palm Beach while enjoying the laid-back nature of the destination.”
Danielle Welsh, meeting and event planner for a Fortune 100 financial services firm, the DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Orlando Airport filled the bill for an 80-attendee general managers meeting. “Although many steer away from airport properties, it is worth taking a look at them for smaller budget meetings,” Welsh says. “And, as the only group in the hotel, we were the ‘big fish’ — which is not the norm when you select a large, big-box property. The pricing was very competitive and the property has a fantastic staff and A/V team.” The DoubleTree, which was renovated this year, has a 7,350-sf ballroom, along with eight breakout rooms and five boardrooms providing an additional 9,500 sf of flexible conference and pre-function space. The hotel is located less than 10 minutes from the airport, amid a cluster of other smaller hotels and chain restaurants, and shuttles provide free transportation from the airport.

Welsh says the DoubleTree accommodated many agenda changes during the meeting. “Their team rolled with the punches. Our group tends to go back and forth with their wants and needs, and the hotel accommodated all that they could to make our client happy. The catering was great, as we often request to customize existing breaks to enhance or ensure all dietary restrictions are observed. The in-house A/V team was very cost effective, which is a huge surprise in this industry — it was one of the best experiences we have had with an A/V team.”

Despite the airport location, off-site activities are plentiful. “A group could meet here for multiple events and not repeat an activity for attendees,” Welsh says. “We had a casual dine-around at Universal CityWalk. Even though the attendees did not have access to the rides, it was exciting for them to get a quick park experience.”

Buffeted by year-round sunshine, Florida’s diversity of settings, attractions, resorts and world-class convention facilities, along with solid air access, make the state a clear leader for meeting and exhibition space. When you book your meeting or event with Hilton Lake Buena Vista or Hilton Buena Vista Palace, you gain special access to the programs of the Disney Institute, unique Disney in-park event venues, keynote speakers, exclusive Behind the Scenes Tours and more.

Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate next year will undergo a complete renovation of all 720 guest rooms and work on the public and private meeting spaces.

Nearby, at the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort, a 14-story addition in winter 2021 will add 349 new guest rooms and suites, more than 22,000 sf of meeting space, including two ballrooms, and a rooftop reception space offering spectacu- lar views of the nightly Walt Disney World fireworks, and other amenities.

Next summer, the Omni Orlando Resort at Champion- Gate, located 28 miles southwest of the Orlando International Airport, will undergo a complete renovation of all 720 guest rooms. Updates will include furnishings and re-carpeting of the meeting and public spaces of the main resort is also planned. Projected to be completed by the end of this year is a renovation of the resort lobby and David’s Club, known for bourbons, craft cocktails and prime cuts.

Not every gathering planned for insurance and financial institutions involves a lavish budget, and for two hotels, one amazing location

steps from Disney Springs

Hilton Orlando Lake Buena Vista and Hilton Orlando Buena Vista Palace are official Walt Disney World® hotels, connected via Skybridge to Disney Springs®, featuring over 150 shopping, dining and entertainment options. With a combined 186,000 square feet of flexible meeting and event space, our award-winning catering and events teams will bring your next meeting or event to an entirely new level.

THE DISNEY DIFFERENCE

When you book your meeting or event with Hilton Lake Buena Vista or Hilton Buena Vista Palace, you gain special access to the programs of the Disney Institute, unique Disney in-park event venues, keynote speakers, exclusive Behind the Scenes Tours and more.
We honor the deserving winners of the 2019 World Class Awards with this special section devoted to the hardworking staff of the best of the best — the convention and visitors bureaus, and hotels, resorts and conference centers. The high standards for convention and visitors bureaus include these criteria: superior service and support and promotional assistance. For hotels, resorts and conference centers, the criteria include: superior staff service and exceptional ambience. Some of the fine winners of the 2019 World Class Award are profiled on the following pages.

CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAUS

Discover The Palm Beaches
West Palm Beach, FL

Experience Scottsdale
Scottsdale, AZ

Greater Fort Lauderdale Convention & Visitors Bureau
Fort Lauderdale, FL

Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau
Miami, FL

Hawaii Visitors & Convention Bureau
Honolulu, HI

Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority
Las Vegas, NV

Nashville Convention & Visitors Corp.
Nashville, TN

San Francisco Travel Association
San Francisco, CA

Visit Austin
Austin, TX

Visit Charlotte
Charlotte, NC

Visit Dallas
Dallas, TX

VISIT DENVER
Denver, CO

Visit Jacksonville
Jacksonville, FL

Visit Tucson
Tucson, AZ

HOTELS, RESORTS & CONFERENCE CENTERS

ARIA Resort & Casino
Las Vegas, NV

Arizona Biltmore, A Waldorf Astoria Resort
Phoenix, AZ

Atlantis, Paradise Island, Bahamas
Paradise Island, The Bahamas

Aulani, A Disney Resort & Spa
Ko Olina, HI

Boca Raton Resort & Club, A Waldorf Astoria Resort
Boca Raton, FL

The Breakers Palm Beach
Palm Beach, FL

The Broadmoor
Colorado Springs, CO

Caesars Palace
Las Vegas, NV

The Diplomat Beach Resort Hollywood, Curio Collection by Hilton
Hollywood, FL

Fontainebleau Miami Beach
Miami Beach, FL

Fort Lauderdale Marriott Harbor Beach Resort & Spa
Fort Lauderdale, FL

Gaylord Opryland Resort & Convention Center
Nashville, TN

Loews Portofino Bay Hotel at Universal Orlando
Orlando, FL

M Resort Spa Casino
Las Vegas, NV

Ocean Reef Club
Key Largo, FL

Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate
Orlando, FL

The Ritz-Carlton Golf Resort, Naples
Naples, FL

Sea Island Resort
Sea Island, GA

Trump National Doral Miami
Miami, FL

Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort
Lake Buena Vista, FL

Wynn Las Vegas
Las Vegas, NV
VISIT AUSTIN

by Austin? Why not? Finding fault with The Live Music Capital of the World is almost as tough as narrowing down the 10 best reasons to meet there.

1. Flying here is easy and convenient. Austin-Bergstrom International Airport (ABIA), which saw a record number of passengers in 2018 and underwent a $350 million expansion that added nine new gates in early 2019, has more than 350 daily flights to 70-plus nonstop locations around the world.

2. Everyone loves the Austin Convention Center. Its green (LEED Gold certified), it’s close to everything (with that prime downtown location), and it’s state-of-the-art (Wi-Fi is fast and free?). What’s not to love?

3. It’s group friendly. Many of the attractions that make Austin such a popular destination with visitors are capable of accommodating private events, including barbeque joints, waterfront venues on Lake Austin, and of course its 250-plus live music venues.

4. Groups can tap into its energetic spirit. The birthplace of Whole Foods, Dell, and South by Southwest has one of the busiest startup scenes in the country. From live bands greeting attendees at the airport to private concert finales, Austin’s famous live music scene supplies a constant stream of entertainment options for meetings.

5. It’s a wellspring of inspiration. Finding speakers or collaborators for inspired programming is easy since Austin’s intellectual capital is rich and diverse. For example, health-care groups can work with the University of Texas at Austin’s Dell Medical School and local biotech firms.

6. It’s powered by music. From live bands greeting attendees at the airport to private concert finales, Austin’s famous live music scene supplies a constant stream of entertainment options for meetings.

7. The hotel options are shiny, new, and plentiful. Austin has more than 42,000 total hotel rooms (13,000 downtown). Surrounding the Convention Center are its four largest hotels: Fairmont Austin (1,048 rooms), JW Marriott Austin (1,012 rooms), Hilton Austin (801 rooms), and Marriott Downtown (612 rooms, opening 2020). Outside of downtown, take advantage of Austin’s justifiably famous Hill Country resorts including: Horseshoe Bay Resort (400 rooms), Hyatt Lost Pines Resort & Spa (491 rooms), Lake Austin Spa Resort (40 rooms), Lakeway Resort & Spa (375 rooms), Miraval Austin (117 rooms), Omni Barton Creek Resort & Spa (493 rooms) and Kalahari Resorts & Conventions Round Rock (975 rooms, opening 2020).

8. It’s a city where attendees can really dig in. One could argue that the state capital of Texas might also be its culinary capital. The cuisines are many, the tacos and barbecue are legendary, and the cocktails are fiercely potent.

9. Feeling safe is a given. Attendees can explore downtown without worry.

10. Austin is authentic. There’s no mistaking where you are when you’re in Austin. It’s a sure bet that attendees will fall hard for Austin, making it an ideal place to meet year after year.

Visit meet.austintexas.org

Austin is growing every day. With a wide variety of on-site venues and growing hotel space, our city is ready to welcome you. Come see how the Live Music Capital of the World can offer you a unique meeting experience. Keep up to date on all of Austin’s venues at visitaustin.org/meet.
From perfect weather, pristine beaches, and top-rated attractions to world-class hotels, dining, and a thriving arts and culture scene, Miami has everything you need to host the meeting or convention of your dreams. Few places in the world deliver such a thriving mix of international sophistication, natural tropical beauty and authentic cultural diversity as Miami.

**Latin, Caribbean Flavors**

Miami is a place where beauty and richness await to be found across the city, particularly among the many hidden gems it offers. Miami’s diverse neighborhoods are a great place to start, where visitors are encouraged to explore the rich cultural roots that make Miami an incredible melting pot. Discover the Latin flavors of Little Havana or the Caribbean heritage of Little Haiti. Stroll through the street art district of Wynwood or the charming bohemian neighborhood of Coconut Grove. If you seek a more cosmopolitan edge, the bustling epicenter of Downtown Miami, with its gleaming skyscrapers, sweeping waterfront bay views, and endless shopping and dining possibilities, is the perfect neighborhood for you.

And no journey to Miami is complete without exploring iconic South Beach, where the eclectic lifestyles and colorful art deco architecture come to life. Along with the stunning beauty of its beaches and colorful buildings, South Beach also offers a diverse mix of world-class boutiques, galleries and stores.

**Headquarter Hotel Plans**

A vibrant and dynamic global hub, Miami continues to reinvent itself with incredible hotels, meeting spaces and enhanced infrastructure. Among the creative venue options is the reimagined Miami Beach Convention Center, featuring nearly 500,000 sf of versatile exhibition space and more than 180,000 sf of meeting space, including a 60,000-sf grand ballroom, a 20,000-sf junior ballroom, and 84 breakout rooms. The space also features a terrace where attendees can step out, mingle, and soak up the city’s signature sunshine and ocean breeze.

The Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau is excited to announce that the Miami Beach Convention Center will soon be home to a connecting 800-room headquarter hotel, making Miami the ultimate convenient meeting destination.

Miami is also easy to get to, with Miami International Airport (MIA) offering more than 400 flights from around the globe daily and serving more airlines than any other airport in the U.S. If you are already in Florida, try the Brightline, a stylish express train service that provides intercity travel, connecting Miami, Fort Lauderdale and West Palm Beach, with service between Miami and Orlando coming soon.

These are just a few of the memorable and magical highlights awaiting any meeting planner considering Miami. Visit miamiandbeaches.com for more.

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**Miami Meetings**

800-933-8448 ext. 3071
Meetings@MiamiMeetings.com

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**Citywide Facts & Features**

- Guest Rooms: 55,394
- Hotels/Resorts: 426
- Meeting Space: 1.2 million sf
- Special Amenities: The Miami Beach Convention Center features nearly 500,000 sf of versatile exhibition space.
Sea Island's setting as a barrier island provides myriad outdoor activities including biking, fly fishing or simply relaxing. The Broadmoor spend much of their time outdoors hiking, soaring, mountain biking, fly fishing or simply relaxing by the pool.

The grounds are home to not one but two championship golf courses, a nationally recognized tennis program, and a Forbes Five-Star spa and fitness center. There’s also plenty to choose from when it comes to shopping and dining, with 23 retail boutiques and 10 restaurants, including Colorado’s only Forbes Five-Star and AAA Five-Diamond restaurant, Penrose Room.

Recreational activities include guided fly fishing, pickleball, mountain biking, rock climbing tours, fly fishing, paintball, and more. The Broadmoor also offers three exciting attractions: Seven Falls, a magnificent series of waterfalls in a secluded canyon; The Broadmoor Soaring Adventure zip line courses, which fly thriller seekers over scenic, wild terrain for the ultimate adrenaline rush; and the Pikes Peak Cog Railway. From April through early November, you can also enjoy The Broadmoor Wilderness Experience boutique properties, The Ranch at Emerald Valley, Cloud Camp, and the Orvis branded Fly Fishing Camp. All three of these all-inclusive enclaves offer Colorado mountain adventures complete with Broadmoor-quality food and service.

While The Broadmoor may feel remote, it is easily accessible for guests from around the country and the world. Only a 15-minute drive from the resort, Colorado Springs Airport is serviced by nonstop flights via multiple cities and major airlines. Additionally Denver International Airport, which offers connections to many international destinations, is located just over an hour north. Door-to-door shuttle or sedan service from both airports is available through the resort’s transportation partners at Gray Line.
Recognized a total of 251 times with Forbes Five-Star and AAA Five-Diamond awards.

For 190 years, The Broadmoor and Sea Island have provided distinctive, magnificent settings and extraordinary experiences for groups ranging from intimate board meetings to trade shows. Each resort features world-class golf, dining, spa, and outdoor adventures to enhance your event. With both of these iconic properties in a 100-year family trust, our guarantee is that while the setting will vary, the consistent quality of meetings and meticulous attention to detail never will.

We invite you to call to begin planning your next event.

**Meeting Space—Unique**

With 185,000 square feet of sophisticated event space, The Broadmoor understands the unique needs and attention required to create memorable, successful meetings. From boardrooms and Broadmoor Hall’s 60,000 square feet at the main campus to Cloud Camp’s Overlook at 9,200-foot elevation, we have the space to make your meeting memorable.

**Activities—For Everyone**

Meeting attendees can hike scenic trails, experience horseback riding and mountain biking, or archery. Broadmoor Outfitters offers expert instruction in fly fishing, falconry, zip lining and much more. Championship golf courses, and our Forbes Five-Star Spa provide rest and reward.

**Accommodations—Variety**

The 784 guest rooms, suites, cottages, brownstones, and The Broadmoor Estate House feature the elegant touches and amenities at the main campus. Provide adventure at one of the three Broadmoor Wilderness Experiences: Cloud Camp, The Ranch at Emerald Valley, and The Broadmoor Fly Fishing Camp.

**Meeting Space—Flexibility**

With more than 42,000 square feet of indoor space and an island full of outdoor gathering options, Sea Island venues range from boardrooms to ballrooms, accommodating 5 to 500 people. From food and décor to technical expertise, our seasoned team brings creativity and attention to detail to every conference, executive retreat, and customized meeting.

**Activities—For Everyone**

Sea Island provides an extensive array of options for your meeting attendees including customized team building activities, outdoor experiences such as fishing, water sports, shooting school and falconry, a 65,000-square-foot spa and fitness center, championship golf courses, and the nation’s finest Golf Performance Center.

**Accommodations—Choice**

Our 400 rooms and suites ensure we have a room type to meet your needs from The Cloister, nestled between the Black Banks River and the Atlantic Ocean to The Lodge, overlooking golf and the ocean, The Inn, our select-service property. Or for those seeking outdoor adventure, we offer Broadfield, our 5,800-acre sporting club.
Ur five towers, which include high-end suites and villas, will make every guest feel like royalty. The grandeur and lavishness of Caesars Palace extends triumphantly into 300,000 sf of stately meeting facilities. Our conference center is ideal for meetings with direct access to the Palace Tower and comfortably set apart from the casino area. These two stories include two 51,000-sf ballrooms that can be configured into 25 separate breakout rooms and overlooks the Garden of the Gods Pool Oasis. Meeting planners will find an outstanding range of flexible meeting spaces to accommodate large-scale productions or small groups.

Add a twist to your event by hosting it at one of our unique special venues. The Colosseum, home of the greatest entertainers in the world, is available for general sessions. Imagine your CEO on the same stage graced by Madonna and Jerry Seinfeld. In summer 2019, The Colosseum underwent a transformation that includes a state-of-the-art sound system, new moving light fixtures, a hi-def LED video wall, and refurbished seating to enhance the theater’s comfort.

Flexibility is key with Caesars Entertainment. With one phone call you have access to all our properties within one destination. One contact, one contract and one food and beverage minimum. The possibilities are endless with Caesars Entertainment.
The Ballantyne, a Luxury Collection Hotel, Charlotte, in North Carolina has named Beth Allen director of sales and marketing. Allen will oversee all direct sales, public relations and marketing communications for the hotel. Previously, Allen served as director of sales and marketing at Capella Hotel Group’s Solis Hotel in Atlanta.

Heather Allison has been appointed complex director of sales and marketing for New York Marriott Marquis and Sheraton New York Times Square. In her new role, Allison will oversee all sales and marketing efforts for these major New York City hotel properties. She brings more than 25 years of hospitality experience to her new role.

Union Station Hotel Nashville in Tennessee has promoted Trevor Bondarchuk to director of sales and marketing. Bondarchuk joined the property as director of sales in May 2019, and previously spent two years as director of group sales and events for Sage Hospitality in the Pacific Northwest.

Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate has welcomed LeAnn Davis as director of sales and marketing. Davis will oversee the direction of the sales team, drive revenue streams for the resort, contribute to the group and convention sales strategy and provide executive leadership. Davis brings to her new role more than 13 years of large hotel sales leadership experience and more than 26 years of sales hospitality experience.

New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center has named Austin Deeks ancillary sales manager. In his new role, Deeks will be responsible for the promotion, sale and coordination of the production, technology and digital capabilities of the Convention Center, and helping clients with their technology and production needs.

Atlantic Paradise Island, Bahamas has appointed Bryan Gay as senior vice president of sales. Gay will oversee group and leisure sales, wedding and event planning and conference planning for the resort. He brings more than 20 years of experience in the hospitality industry to his new role.

New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center has welcomed Gina Locatto as special events sales manager for the Convention Center. In her new role, Locatto will focus on the sales of non-traditional events in the facility, including all of the Convention Center’s Mardi Gras events, consumer shows and local corporate events.

Hard Rock International has named Donna Marchese as regional director of global sales – Americas. In this role, Marchese will be responsible for building awareness for the iconic Hard Rock brand, developing relationships with key group clients and agencies in the Northeast, and ultimately driving business to the entire portfolio.

Omni Hotels & Resorts in Irving, Texas has promoted Andrew Rubinacci to chief commercial officer. Rubinacci joined Omni a year ago as senior vice president of sales management and global distribution. In his new role, Rubinacci will drive revenue generation across the organization, aligning marketing, revenue management, distribution and sales to better optimize performance. In addition, Omni has promoted Dan Surette to chief sales officer. In his new role, Surette will intensify efforts across all sales channels for Omni Hotels & Resorts. Additionally, Surette will oversee Omni’s strategic partnerships on behalf of the brand. 

WHEN YOUR CONVENTION CENTER IS ALREADY ONE OF THE BEST, HOW DO YOU MAKE IT EVEN BETTER? YOU EXPAND.

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340,000 square feet of new flexible space

+ MORE CONNECTIVITY
A new Grand Concourse with 60,000 square feet

+ MORE VERSATILITY
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